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Women and Death Rituals in Late Antiquity: Forming the Christian Identity

by

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Abstract

Widely scattered primary data confirm that Roman-Christian families managed the rituals for death, burial, and commemoration of the dead at the domestic level. The performance of this domestic worship was regulated within the *sacra privata*, which largely explains the lack of any serious interest by the emergent church in funerary matters until the mid-eighth century. During late antiquity therefore, Christian women as the primary caregivers and ritual specialists of the *familia*, assisted the dying; prepared the corpse for burial; lamented the dead in song, poetry, music, drama, and dance; hosted funerary banquets, and remembered deceased family with regular offerings at the cemetery. Women were patrons and administrators of cemeteries, catacombs, martyr-shrines, and voluntary associations that buried deceased members. It was not until ca.750 that the Frankish bishops requested the nuns at the abbey in Chelles to compile the rituals for Christian dying, death, and burial; the result was a *sacramentary* of funerary liturgy called the Vatican Gelasian. This document became the foundation of the church's response to death, *extrema unctio*, which would eventually be adopted at the Council of Trent in 1545 as the Christian sacrament, *Extreme Unction*.

Using an array of material, including textual and visual, that is read through various interdisciplinary lenses, this study proposes that Roman-Christian women not only performed the rituals for dying, death, and commemoration of the dead in the early centuries of Christianity, they also contributed in very significant ways to the formation of Christian identity. Women's specialization in death ritual affirms a specific status and role for women in late-antique Christianity that has been previously neglected in the scholarship.

Acknowledgements

I have always had an interest in the function of women in the early church. Christianity must have required their creativity, resilience, and nurturance. Scholars however, have failed to fully examine women in the domestic realm where Roman-Christian families practiced their religiosity in matters of death. A wide scattering of scholarly ‘crumbs’ throughout late antiquity has suggested female involvement in the building of church community. I have attempted in this thesis to gather into one place those many tantalizing ‘crumbs’ in the hopes that they may form a ‘whole loaf’ and reveal more precisely women’s roles. I submit that late-ancient wives, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers deserve to have it told that, through their prominence in funerary rituals, women helped to forge the Christian identity.

This study has been no small undertaking. I could not have seen its completion without the assistance of some very special people. Therefore, I wish to sincerely thank the following individuals for their assistance: Dr. Anne Moore for her expert guidance, support, and inspiration; Warren Harbeck PhD (columnist, *Cochrane Eagle*) for encouraging my return to higher learning; the professors and grad students of RELS (Religious Studies department) for showing the way; Dr. Lisa Hughes and Dr. Wayne McCready for sitting on my committee; my dear husband Pat for his patience and advocacy; my children and their spouses for believing anything is possible; my grandchildren for cheering ‘Go, Nana, Go!’ and for my parents, Stella and George Murphy for fostering the love of learning from the very beginning. Finally, there is my debt to Dan Brown for writing *The Da Vinci Code*. His book sparked this quest for the whole story.

Dedication

To

the countless Roman-Christian women

who served their families in matters of death

and, in doing so,

made significant contributions to the forging

of a Christian identity

in late antiquity.

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List of Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers. 1946–
AHR	*American Historical Review*
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina. Tournhout: Brepols, 1953–
CH	*Church History*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin 1863–
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Edited by Arthur Vööbus.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
GR	*Greece and Rome*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Edited by Philip Schaff.
PG	*Patrologiae Graeca*. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris, 1857/1886.
PL	*Patrologia Latina*. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Paris, 1841–1864.
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	*Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*. Edited by J. D. Mansi.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is preliminary and tentative; it offers a different framework, another lens, a creative approach by which to address the apparent gap in the scholarship pertaining to women and the Christian response to death in late antiquity. That is not to say the component parts—early Christian women (Osiek and MacDonald, 2006), Roman mortuary rites in late antiquity (Rush, 1941 and Toynbee, 1971), the care of the sick and dying in late Roman Christianity (Paxton, 1990 and Rebillard, 2003/2009)—have not been investigated separately, just that scholarship is lacking in terms of the combined topic—women, death, and late-antique Christianity. Arguably the women have been observed in terms of their association with death-related topics—women and the martyr cult (Peter Brown, 1981), women and the praying *orans* (Janet Tulloch, 2004/2006), women and hysterical lamentation (MacDonald, 1996), and women and funeral meals (Jensen, 2008). Still, there are gaps. The church showed no interest in regulating practices surrounding death until after the fourth century; further, an ecclesiastical funerary liturgy was not developed until the eighth century. Early Christian families were left to cope with death in the domestic realm following the old Roman *sacra privata*. Therefore, it seems consequential to ask whether Christian families used Roman rituals for dying, death, and commemoration. And since women were the primary caregivers in Greco-Roman society, what roles were expected of them in terms of death in the family? What constituted the Christian funerary rites in late antiquity? How did those rites develop their Christian character, especially if the church remained disassociated from death liturgy? In the tension created between the bishops and the laity for jurisdiction over funeral liturgy, what, if any difference was made by women? This thesis is an attempt to answer these

and other questions. The content of each of the chapters is described in the brief overview that follows.

Chapter One establishes a disciplinary context for this study. It surveys the development of women's history by examining its roots in feminism. It explains how women's history became coupled with feminist politics through its 19th and 20th century encounters with biblical feminism, feminist Christian theology, and feminist history. The chapter describes how my study will 'uncouple' its particular research objectives, parameters, and heuristic categories from the feminist agenda by means of historical reconstruction, embedding Christianity into the late Roman context, and incorporating the paradigm shift that recognizes domestic religiosity (*sacra privata*) was as valid as state/public religion (*sacra publica*) in the Roman world.

Chapter Two addresses methodology. First, the limitations and parameters of the study are acknowledged. Then the data sets of primary materials (literary and non-literary texts and material culture) are laid out and defined. Next, the research methods necessary for analyzing the various data sets are specified. Finally, the chapter explains the use of the social sciences as heuristic devices for reconstructing, embedding, and understanding women's lives (especially in matters of death).

In Chapter Three the existing research on Greco-Roman funerary practices is analyzed and then interpreted to extrapolate women's probable roles on behalf of the family in terms of the cult of the dead. The six stages of the Roman funeral provide a discussion framework.

Chapter Four utilizes the same six stages of the funeral to collate available data, this time about Christian funerary practices in late antiquity. Essentially, the chapter

investigates the practices of early Christian women in their domestic setting as they worked on behalf of the family and under *sacra privata* in coping with dying, death, burial, and commemoration of the dead.

Chapter Five closes the thesis with a summary of implications and conclusions. Significantly, this study determines that Christian women in late antiquity were indeed ritual specialists in matters pertaining to death in the domestic setting. They performed their roles surrounding death according to *sacra privata* on behalf of the family. The study affirms that past scholarship in terms of women's association with the martyr cults, the *orans*, hysterical lamentation, and funeral meals do not represent isolated activities performed by women; rather they represent a cluster of activities related by *sacra privata* which were subject to the processes of assimilation, resistance, and adaptation as Christianity took form.

The study also reveals that, in their roles as funerary ritualists, women made an important contribution to the emerging Christian identity. Christianity itself adopted and adapted Rome's division of worship, *sacra publica – sacra privata*. With the continuation and transformation of Roman funerary practices by Christian laity, women potentially mediated the process of assimilation and resistance that would later, in the middle ages, produce the formal sacrament of *Extreme Unction*. At the same time, the process generated a creative tension allowing women's prominence in areas like the martyr cults and in less studied areas like lamentation and the development of Christian music—at least for a time.

In sum, this study makes three substantive contributions to its disciplinary context and opens a door for further scholarship. First, it advances women's history by: a)

embedding the mass of evidence back into the domestic religiosity of late antiquity; b) "un-coupling" women's history from past entanglements with feminist politics and theology, and c) retaining some of the valuable methodological approaches developed in earlier discourse. Second, this thesis demonstrates that fully embedding Christianity into its socio-historical context reveals the role played by domestic religiosity in forming the Christian identity. Third, by reconstructing domestic religiosity around death, this study discloses the ritual specialty of women as established by *sacra privata*, which, when transferred and assimilated by Christianity, allowed women a specific status and provided creative roles for them in the emerging church. Finally, this thesis presents a consolidation of multiple scattered data, making it now possible to address a number of related topics in future research.

Chapter One

Disciplinary Context

This thesis concerns death, burial, and commemoration of the dead in the early years of Christianity, 200–800 C.E. More specifically it deals with the roles that Christian women played in the context of funerary ritual in the period known as late antiquity.[1] Due to its focus on women, my thesis is a contribution to women's history. Also, because of its concentration on the historical reconstruction of Christian burial practices in late antiquity, this thesis is part of the scholastic examination associated with the rituals and popular religiosity in the formation of Christian identity. This means that, in terms of the academic discourse, this study engages with: 1) the discussion concerning women's history and feminism; 2) the treatment of Christianity as separate from its contemporaneous socio-cultural matrix and/or embedded character within Roman society, and 3) the interaction between religion (beliefs of the élite) versus religiosity (practices of the people) and the contribution of this interaction to the formation of Christian identity.

Women's History and Feminism

The academic pursuit of women's history in early and late late-antique Christianity was, and in some respects still is, an entanglement of political feminism, feminist theology, and women's historiography. The emergence in the late 1900s of a feminist political movement from within the parameters of Christianity, and the specific

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1. There are differences in opinion about the labels we use for the period: early or ancient Christianity; early-to-late-antique Christianity; late antiquity; early middle ages; late Roman period or late Roman Empire. For the sake of convenience, I will regard 200–800 C.E. as 'late antiquity' in this thesis.

agenda of political feminists during the twentieth century—in reference to the influence of Christianity upon issues of gender, women's authority, and women's status—soon resulted in a reticulation of feminist politics on the one hand, feminist Christian theology on the other, and an intermingling of gender-feminist history all attempting to reconstruct the lives of women. Arguably, women's history was firmly coupled with feminism.

This thesis un-couples women's history from its attachment to feminist politics and theology in order to obtain a clearer picture of women's religiosity in matters of death and burial during 200–800 C.E. To accomplish this goal, the first order of business is to clarify the quandary of assumptions, definitions, and scholarly terms associated with this complex discourse. What exactly is meant by women's history? Gender history? Feminist history? Political feminism? Feminist theology? Feminist historiography? The following discussion will untangle some of the language and intent that exists in the disciplinary context of women's history as it pertains to an examination of women, death rituals, and Christianity in late antiquity.

The Beginning

The process of developing women's history began as a convoluted trajectory from the very outset. In the 1890s Elizabeth Cady Stanton decided to organize a group of scholars for the purpose of retranslating the Bible; she and others maintained that particular sections of the Bible subordinating women were the work of men and that the Bible was in fact "a political weapon against women's struggle for liberation."[2] The result

2. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 7. Judith Bennett notes that while Stanton may have been the first feminist to invoke political theology, it can be argued that Christine de Pizan—who used language in the form of poetry to posit that women had an equal right to speak out in fifteenth century French society—was the "mother of feminism." J. M. Bennett "Feminism and History," *Gender & History* 1.3 (Autumn 1989): 267.

of Stanton's work was the controversial *Women's Bible* published in 1895 and 1898.[3] On the one hand, it could be said that Stanton and the members of her committee were some of the first women to acknowledge the 'androcentric' nature of the text (though they did not use that term, which is today one of the fundamental axioms in political feminism, feminist history, feminist Christian theology, and women's history). On the other hand however, such a declaration during this period was a direct challenge to the authority of the Bible as indicated by Elizabeth Schüzzler Fiorenza who states, "the ensuing debate did not centre on women as makers and participants [agents] in history, but on the authority of biblical or biblical revelation … and in defending or claiming the revelatory authority of the Bible for or against the feminist cause."[4] Specifically, the focus was on the biblical text per se rather than on examining the lives of historical women or analyzing the texts for clues to the history of women. Stanton's project centered on the biblical text in terms of feminist Christian theology, and to what may be deemed 'feminist history'—notably both areas carried political overtones. This was the stage upon which women's history, as it pertains to Christianity, would be first performed.

Political Feminism and Christian Theology

Early in the twentieth century, scholarship on women in the New Testament and early Christianity continued the focus on patriarchal biblical teachings and their impact on women. Women's history was submerged, if not neglected, due to the emphasis on issues related to political feminism and feminist Christian theology. As historian, Judith

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3. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 7–14.

4. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 27.

M. Bennett states, “Women’s history (defined as historical work on women) and feminist history (defined as historical work infused by a concern about the past and present oppression of women),” while not identical, have always been intimately coupled.[5] In fact, women’s history had feminist origins and “owes a great deal to feminist pressure” for its “institutionalization” beginning in the 1960s.[6]

By the late 1960s and post Vatican II, the history of Christian women began to appear from beneath a focus on the ‘revelatory authority of the Bible’ and feminist concerns of patriarchy and oppression of women. Drawing upon advancements in New Testament scholarship such as redaction, socio-historical, and literary criticism, scholars like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Elaine Pagels considered the androcentric nature of the New Testament and early Christian writings.[7] However, these and other feminist scholars during the 1970s and 80s began to temper their language: ‘oppression of women’ was expressed more often as, ‘subordination of women’ or ‘inequality of the sexes’; the terms ‘patriarchy,’ ‘paternalism,’ ‘male dominance/domination,’ and ‘male supremacy’ were replaced by the less-confrontational, ‘androcentrism.’[8] This shift of language signaled a concern with developing more appropriate academic perspectives for analyzing ancient texts; however, it still disclosed a feminist agenda. Women’s history (along with gender history, feminist studies, and

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5. Bennett, “Feminism,” 253. Bennett reiterates that women’s history has feminist origins. “Feminism,” 267.

6. Bennett, “Feminism,” 253.

7. See for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Misogymism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church” in *Religion and Sexism*, edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther, 150–83 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974). Another example is Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*. Also Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1989).

8. Bennett, “Feminism,” 254.

feminist Christian theology) was developing its own *methodological approach* thanks to the work of Ruether, Fiorenza, and Pagels; yet, the new approach evolved in tandem with a new cultural apologetic in defense of women. Its first component was an original set of hermeneutical devices that would guide the critical reading of early Christian texts. Fiorenza, in response to Stanton's *Women's Bible*, developed a particular understanding of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," to more accurately/fairly interpret the texts about Jewish and early Christian women.[9] Fiorenza's hermeneutics were intended to provide a reading of ancient texts about women that would yield as "accurate historical information about the status and role of women in actual life" as possible.[10] There are four rules: 1) ancient "texts and historical sources … must be read as androcentric texts"; 2) any "glorification … denigration or marginalization of women" in the ancient texts "is to be understood as a social construction of reality in patriarchal terms or as a projection of male reality"; 3) "the formal canons of codified patriarchal law are generally more restrictive" than the actual lives of women and men that "they govern," and 4) "women's social-religious status must be determined by the degree of their economic autonomy and social roles" and not by "ideological or prescriptive statements."[11] Notably, Fiorenza's "hermeneutics of suspicion" now stands as one of the foundational axioms for women's history.

In addition, these 'foremothers' of women's history in Christianity incorporated insights from other disciplines in their attempt to more appropriately reflect the ancient

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9. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 108.

10. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 108.

11. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 108–09.

world. Most significantly, they hinted at the need for sociological models to reconstruct the lives of ancient women by mentioning family structure, class analysis, and sex/gender as social constructions.[12] True to Bennett's analysis, the "pressures of feminism" (especially its language, focus, hermeneutics, methods, and approaches) were providing the structures necessary for the advancement of women's history. Yet the lines were still blurred. Ruether's work in Christian theology remained feminist,[13] Fiorenza insisted on a new *ekklēsia of women* (the wo/men's church),[14] and Pagels continued to champion the Gnostic model for its perceived focus on women's equality and the acceptance of Christian heresies as merely a different religiosity for women.[15] By Bennett's definition (mentioned above), the tone of women's history remained feminist—it was unmistakably infused with "concern about the past and present oppression of women."[16]

Integrating the Social Sciences

Nevertheless, in the mid 1990s the vitality of this women's history discourse encouraged Karen Jo Torjesen to employ specific social science theories. She borrowed from anthropology the understanding of the 'gender-ness' of private and public spaces to

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12. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 91.

13. For her feminist theological methodology, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," *JSOT* 22 (1982): 54–66. Ruether discusses ways to critique patriarchy in terms of theology in the Bible—methods and resources that "can be authentically appropriated by feminists as a decisive tool of liberation of humanity from bondage to sexism and paternalism." Reuther, "Feminism," 54.

14. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 285–342.

15. Pagels suggests an alternative to a patriarchal orthodox Christianity in the egalitarianism (especially for women) practiced by the 'heretical' Gnostic Christians of the first four centuries. *Gnostic Gospels*, 149-51. See also Karen L. King, "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority: The Case of the *Gospel of Mary* (Magdalene)," in *Women Preachers and Prophets: Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, 21–41 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

16. Bennett, "Feminism," 253.

construct a theory about the rise of female leadership in early Christianity. Torjesen pointed to the private/female sphere of the Pauline house churches and its subsequent decline due to the movement of the church into the public/male area of the basilica.[17] Again of note, the integration of social science into the examinations of women's history is now 'standard working procedure' for most scholars.[18]

Torjesen also used Fiorenza's technique, the 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' to discern the importance of women in the Empty Tomb stories of the Gospels, various sections of the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Gospel of Mary*.[19] Quoting Torjesen, "If these accounts of women's important participations hadn't been grounded in intractable fact, they would not have survived in such a male-dominated culture."[20] Similar to the discussion concerning Fiorenza and the early 'foremothers' of women's history, Torjesen succeeded in advancing the development of methodological strategies; however, her 'history' was still intertwined with feminism. The focus of Torjesen's history was to prove the status of women as leaders (apostles, priests, and deacons) in the early church in order to authorize that same status in modern Christianity.

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17. Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

18. A brief indication of the literature includes edited books discussing the most common theories employed by scholars of Christian history: Richard L. Rohrbaugh, ed. *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) and Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris, eds. *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 2010). In reference to women see: Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006) and Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary*, JSNT Supplement 269 (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

19. Torjesen, *When Women Were*, 33–37.

20. Torjesen, *When Women Were*, 37.

This tendency to do women's history for the purpose of political and theological feminism continued with Luise Schottroff 's work in *Lydia's Impatient Sisters* where she dealt with women's oppression, patriarchy, feminist theology, and the dichotomy between "the biblical tradition and the women and men of today who hunger for justice."[21] Schottroff also avidly employed a technique called the "criterion of embarrassment" developed by New Testament scholars but now also used by feminist historians.[22] The criterion was designed to test the veracity of early Christian texts by assessing how 'embarrassing' a certain event might have been for the church; if the embarrassment was retained in the text, then the event was deemed as likely historical. For example, in examining the story of Jesus' rescue of the woman about to be stoned for committing adultery (John 7.53–8.11), Schottroff noted,

> It was not until the third century C.E. [that this story found] its way into the canonical tradition [and] after that, the pericope suffered a varied fate in that it was often deleted from tradition … the ancient church was suspicious about the [topic of the] adulterous woman [and therefore] … opposed and suppressed it … for its content. Jesus' forgiving words to such a woman were at odds with the church's penitential discipline.[23]

Schottroff argued that since "the language and narrative type" of the text fit "better into the Synoptic Gospels than into John, … [that] from a feminist perspective, [this is] an indication that the story could not be harmonized with the interests of a church oriented toward dominance."[24] In other words, "Jesus taking sides with an afflicted and debased

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21. Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 3.

22. See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), especially chapter 6, which explains the criterion of embarrassment.

23. Schottroff, *Lydia's Sisters*, 180.

24. Schottroff, *Lydia's Sisters*, 180.

woman" was 'embarrassing' to the early patriarchal church; therefore, the "criterion of embarrassment" reveals the event likely did occur and Jesus was, in effect, actively raising the status of women.[25] The "criterion of embarrassment" as redefined by Schottroff for women's history was subsequently added to the hermeneutical 'toolbox.'

The Dilemma of Gender Studies

The 1990s also demonstrated how gender studies impacted women's history, particularly in terms of *gender* as "the body" or as "women's experience"; however, neither focus—body or experience—proved particularly helpful to scholars since "fixed meanings of bodies … [could not satisfy] all theories of sexual and gender difference" and besides, "differing societal factors caused different experiences."[26] *Gender* was eventually defined as, "the socially constructed nature of sexuality and sexual relation" in contrast to *biological sex*.[27] Joan W. Scott in her article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," argued for the inclusion of gender-as-symbolic-production (expressed language) in the above definition; while, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* disagreed, claiming that the definition as it stood was useless because *sex* was also "a

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25. Schottroff, *Lydia's Sisters*, 185.

26. Elizabeth A. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," *CH* 70.3 (Sep 2001): 407–08 and 410. See also Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 773–97. Denise Riley brought attention to the many concerns associated with "experience." *"Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Also Patricia Hill Collins demonstrated that subsequent to the focus on 'experience of women,' the term "womanism" arose in an attempt to qualify the experience encountered by groups of women—for example, "post-colonial women," "women of color," "middle-class women." "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond," *The Black Scholar* 26.1 (1996): 9–16. Also influential was the seminal work by Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988) drawing attention to "the body" and its social construction. Equally groundbreaking was Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

27. Clark, "Women, Gender, and Study," 411.

socially constructed category."[28] Virginia Burrus in 1991 maintained that *gender* was a political device used by the early church to ensure that "orthodoxy was secured by aligning female gender and heresy."[29] Indeed, subsequent scholarship on women as heretics, sorceresses, witches, and markers for deviance, sexual temptation, and depravity was popular for some time for both feminist studies and women's history.[30] Within this academic discussion, there did emerge the general understanding that because the terms, *gender, sex, body*, and *experience* are all, to one degree or another, socially constructed, that these terms must be understood within their specific socio-historical context. Therefore, recent scholarship is now attempting, using social science theories, to reconstruct these terms as defined within the context of Roman and late-antique society.[31] Further, within the scholarly discourse of women's history it is now an axiom that socially constructed connotations are to be utilized; at the same time, women historians admit that their studies are not truly *gender history* because gender history should focus on all gender categories.[32] This is a shortcoming continued in this study in which the female gender is the focus; however, we will understand the gender roles as defined by

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28. Clark, "Women, Gender, and Study," 415–16. See Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *AHR* 91.5 (Dec 1986): 1053–75. Also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

29. Virginia Burrus, "The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome," *HTR* 83 (1991): 229–48. Also Clark, "Women, Gender, and Study," 414.

30. Clark, "Women, Gender, and Study," 414–15.

31. Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). Also Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds. *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Marilyn Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Malden: MA: Blackwell, 2005), and Craig Williams, *Roman Sexualities: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

32. Clark, "Women, Gender, and Study," 419–21.

Roman society rather than those deemed significant for modern feminists. So, the focus is on women's roles within the domestic realm and *sacra privata*.[33]

By the turn of the millennium, religious studies scholars of early-to-late antique Christianity such as Elizabeth A. Clark and Kathleen Corley were more or less incorporating critical biblical and patristic scholarship in conjunction with the social sciences and insights from gender studies as part of their approaches in women's history.[34] Their topics however, still retained elements of political feminism such as concerns about: 1) the authoritative status of women in the early church; 2) how that status validated official roles for females in the church; 3) how both status and roles for women were denounced by the Church Fathers and eventually eliminated by the fourth century, and 4) how early church status and roles for women should equate to leadership for women in the church today.[35] Clark and Corley promoted equality for women within the church, arguing for female ordination and the creation of a more inclusive, if not feminist theology. Women's history remained entangled with political feminism and feminist theology; therefore there remained specific gaps and limitations.

A Departure: The Women's History Approach

In distinction to the discourse outlined above, this thesis does not intertwine contemporary political feminism, feminist Christian theology, or feminist history with their specific research objectives of reconstructing the past to serve contemporary

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33. The idea of sacra privata entails the division of Roman worship into public and

34. Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *JECS* 2 (1994): 155–84. See also two books by Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) and *Maranatha: Women's Funerary Rituals and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

35. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, vol. 13 of *Message of the Church Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984).

feminist agendas. Rather it adopts a strict women's history approach. Its task is to comprehend women in their socio-historical context of Roman-Christian late antiquity specifically in terms of death and funerary ritual. It uses some of the hermeneutical tools as they were developed for the reading of androcentric texts such as Fiorenza's "hermeneutics of suspicion" and Schottroff's "criterion of embarrassment." Furthermore, this thesis is cognizant of the social construction of *gender, body, sexuality*, and *experience*, and therefore employs various social science theories[36] to help reconstruct the women's lives within the Christian community of late antiquity. Above all, in the scholarly tradition of women's history as it has now developed, this study makes every attempt to circumvent contemporary agendas.

One of the best examples of the emerging women's history applied to the area of early Christianity is *A Woman's Place* (2006) by Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet Tulloch. The scholarship in *A Woman's Place* foregrounds women's activities by discussing house churches in terms of the domestic lives of early Christian women. It highlights the experiences of these women by using heuristic categories that are more representative of late Roman period such as women as wives, as mothers, or as widows rather than as priests and clergy, and it examines how these domestic roles contributed to the formation of Christian identity. Moreover, it uses sociology and anthropology to aid in the reconstruction of the late-antique domestic sphere. For example, according to anthropological studies, the domestic sphere—

36. Applicable theories and insights are those arising from cultural anthropology, sociology, material and visual culture, archaeology, epigraphy, social history, social psychology and their associated fields of study including: ritual studies, lament studies, collective identity and group studies, visual studies, and cultural studies. The disciplines mentioned are informed by theories and models such as the following: identity theory, memory theory, theories of domestic/popular religion, assimilation theory, and the 'two-tiered' model of religion among others. These will be further discussed in chapter two.

pertaining to the household or family—reveals a household economy in which women have recognized roles in terms of maintaining and contributing to the economy of the entire *domus*.[37] By following this approach, my thesis (dealing with funerary practice) is a contribution to the evolving discourse of women's history. Given women's involvement during late antiquity with rituals surrounding death, burial and commemoration of the dead (arguably part of the domestic sphere of women), this thesis also foregrounds women's religiosity. It begins its historical reconstruction by using the everyday experiences of late-antique women rather than focusing on modern-day categories or concerns about women within the contemporary church (the feminist approach to women's history). That is to say, the emerging trend in women's history is to embed Christianity in its Roman context first and then watch what surfaces.

Christianity Embedded in Roman Society, Rather Than Unique to It

Previous scholarship treated early-to-late-antique Christianity in isolation as a single, unified, and widespread phenomenon. Religious studies historian Jonathan Z. Smith argued in *Drudgery Divine* that comparative studies in religion tended to stress "the scholar's gaze" and to treat Christianity as unique and untouched by the rest of late antiquity.[38] Smith maintained that comparison, as method and theory, must recognize the role of development and change innate within any historical tradition since that tradition

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37. Osiek & MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 44–45.

38. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34–35, 52–53, 114–15, and especially 116–17.

itself is always "a process of reinterpretation."[39] Consequently, it is a mistake to separate Christianity from late antiquity; Christianity is part of late antiquity. In fact, it is part of the transformation of late antiquity. Christianity must be discussed as 'embedded' within the late-antique Mediterranean world, embedded in everything represented by the late-antique period—its politics, economics, culture, sociology, and yes, religion—even domestic religion.

The ideas that people, communities, or religions do not exist in a vacuum but are instead embedded in their society, that society constructs social reality for people, and that people in turn construct society, have not always been axioms for historical reconstruction. In fact, the idea of *embedded-ness*, which is now a critical axiom of socio-historical scholarship, evolved gradually. Biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann stated in 1953, "No man can adopt a view of the world by his own volition—it is already determined for him by his place in history."[40] Peter Berger in 1966 in *The Social Construction of Reality* added, "Social order is a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production … social order exists only as a product of human activity."[41] Bultmann and Berger, followed by Smith, were urging the very thing more recent scholarship has come to recognize: only by embedding the ancient person, community, or religious ritual back into its own world, culture, and locality can the most accurate

39. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 106–07.

40. Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, edited by Hans Werner Bartsch and translated by Reginald Horace Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), 68.

41. Peter L. Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 49.

reconstruction occur. This process of embedding—also called *immersion*[42]— often requires that the religious studies scholar borrow from anthropology, archaeology, cultural studies, ritual studies, art history, material culture and various other disciplines in order to reconstruct, to the best of one's ability, the complexity and diversity of the period of study. The goal, as Moyer V. Hubbard explains it, is to re-create the "social and historical background"; that is to say, all the "political, … economic, social, and religious realities that dominated the ancient landscape and form[ed] part of the often invisible background to the scattered writings and crumbling artifacts that remain" and in which the subject (in this case, women and death rites) functioned, so as to become a scenario "where background becomes foreground."[43] This process of foregrounding embeds late-antique Christianity in Roman society and it is pivotal for understanding the domestic practices of women, in particular their domestic religiosity in matters of death.

Religion Versus Religiosity

Part of embedding or immersing Christianity into its Roman context is the need to deal with what religious studies historian, Peter Brown, views as an inappropriate division between orthodox religion and popular (or domestic) religion (or 'religiosity'). Traditionally, we have assumed that in late antiquity to be 'Christian'—that is, one's Christian identity—was defined by the Church Fathers; we assumed it meant compliance with the orthodox or correct belief as established by the church. Brown, credits David

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42. "The most effective means of learning another culture is to immerse oneself in that culture—its people, its literature, its ideas." Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A Narrative Introduction* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 4.

43. Hubbard, *Christianity*, 1.

Hume's essay, *The Natural History of Religion*, written in the 1750s, as persuasively portraying a "two-tiered model" of religious attitudes—the sentiment of the church élite versus the sentiment of the people—which, argues Brown, has "remained with us."[44] Brown maintains that modern scholarship was encouraged by Hume's work to distinguish "the views of the potentially enlightened few" from "the intellectual and cultural limitations of the masses" (Hume referred to these masses as "the vulgar").[45] In Brown's estimation, Hume's "two-tiered model" produced for modern scholars of Christianity a sharp separation between the practices of "popular religion" and the dogmas of orthodoxy.[46] However, Brown believes the "two-tiered model could just as well be abandoned," and if it were, then "the greatest immediate advantage would be to make what has been called 'popular religion' in late antiquity and the early middle ages more available to historical interpretation, by treating it as more dynamic."[47] Brown explains,

> The model of "popular religion" that is usually presented by scholars of late antiquity has the disadvantage that it assumes that "popular religion" can be understood only from the viewpoint of the élite. "Popular religion" is presented as in some ways a diminution, a misconception, or a contamination of "*un*-popular religion." Whether it is presented, bluntly, as "popular superstition" or categorized as "lower forms of belief," it is assumed that "popular religion" exhibits modes of thinking and worshiping that are best intelligible in terms of a failure to be something else. For failure to accept the guidance of the élite is invariably presented as having nothing to do with any particular appropriateness or meaningful quality in "popular" belief: it is always ascribed to the abiding limitations of "the vulgar." Popular belief, therefore, can only show itself as a

44. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17.

45. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 13–17.

46. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 15–19.

47. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 18.

> monotonous continuity. It represents an untransformed, un-elevated residue of beliefs current among "the ignorant and uninstructed," that is, "all mankind, a few excepted."[48]

This "two-tiered" model may be one of the contributing factors to the paucity of discussion about domestic religion and women's involvement in religious practice. The popular or domestic religion of the late-antique Roman Christian world included rituals and customs surrounding death, burial, and commemoration of the dead—an activity exclusive to the family and to the women of the family in particular. These same funerary customs were formally adopted and adapted in the process that produced the sacramental liturgy of the eighth century Latin church. Following Brown's argument then, if scholars need to accept that domestic religion is every bit as valid as the orthodox, then the religiosity of late-antique Christian women as funerary ritualists must also be viewed as valid religious (orthodox) practice. Based on these findings then, my thesis considers the funerary rituals (the so-called "popular/domestic religion") practiced in late antiquity by Christian families and articulated by women, as vital to the creation of a Christian identity.

The study of domestic religion, in particular funerary ritual, requires embedding it into the everyday existence of late-antique Roman Christians. Besides scholars like Osiek, MacDonald, and Brown, Ramsay MacMullen and David Frankfurter represent other socio-historians engaged in the type of reconstruction of early and late-antique Christianity as proposed in this study. They incorporate various disciplinary methods to

48. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 19–20.

embed the early church solidly into the religiosity of the Roman world.[49] In particular, Frankfurter's study of the resilience and continuity of domestic religiosity for the very reason that it concerns "the most intimate and critical points of life in ancient and traditional cultures"—birth, infertility, and death—becomes highly relevant to my thesis.[50] The fact that only in the mid eighth century was an 'official liturgy' adopted for Christian funerals is itself a hint of the resilience and continuity of Roman domestic religiosity. According to Frankfurter, religion is a dynamic process that moves its focus either *away from* domestic praxis toward a 'centre' (temple/church) or away from the 'centre' *toward* domestic or popular piety; however, regardless of its position along the continuum between "church/temple" on the one end and "domestic praxis" on the other, the process is still "religion."[51] Therefore, in terms of the development of Christianity as a religion, it begins in the domestic sphere (house churches) and requires several centuries before it develops its own centre. As evident with the development of the sacramental liturgy, dying and death are important life stages that ordinary Christians are reluctant to move to the church until the eighth century. As a result, the rituals associated with death

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49. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100–400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). See also some of MacMullen's other works: *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), and *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009). Additional scholarship by Peter Brown includes: *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), and *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity 200–1000 AD,* 2nd edition, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002). Further, David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), and "Beyond Magic and Superstition" in *Late Ancient Christianity*, edited by Virginia Burrus, vol. 2 of *A People's History of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 255–284.

50. Frankfurter, *Roman Egypt*, 130.

51. Frankfurter, *Roman Egypt*, 6–7, 34–35. See also Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) for a discussion of 'little or local' traditions and 'greater' traditions that constantly play upon one another in waves of assimilation and resistance according to the socio-historical context. This idea dovetails rather well, not only with Frankfurter's assimilation-resistance (domestic religion over-against central religion) paradigm, but also with Brown's reference to Hume's 'two-tiered model' of religion.

remain in the domestic sphere and with women for several centuries, as part of what Frankfurter suggests is the resistance and continuity of domestic religiosity. Significantly, the work of Brown and of Frankfurter also indicates why there are so few studies on women and domestic religiosity—especially Christian women—because one needs to appropriate within such an investigation the assumption that there was a continuation of Roman domestic religiosity in the making of Christian identity.

Perhaps then, it is no surprise that there are relatively few current studies dealing with early Christian women that embed women's lives fully into the Roman context in the manner outlined above. As mentioned, *A Woman's Place* by Osiek and MacDonald is the prominent exception; it successfully investigates the daily lives of ordinary wives, widows, women with children, and female slaves in order to learn how the female dynamic was formative in the construction of Christian identity in the house churches. Similarly, my thesis examines the lives of ordinary wives, widows, daughters, and sisters to determine how women's domestic piety surrounding death was formative in the construction of Christian identity, particularly in terms of sacramental liturgy.

Conclusion

In summary, this thesis seeks to make three contributions to its disciplinary contexts. First, it proposes to advance women's history. It reconstructs late-antique women's involvement with Christian funerary ritual by embedding the mass of evidence back into the domestic religiosity of late antiquity using revised heuristic categories more representative of time and place. My thesis represents the "un-coupling" of women's history from its past entanglement with feminist politics and theology; but at the same

time, it retains some of the methodological approaches developed in this earlier history of the academic discourse. Second, it demonstrates that one of the consequences of fully embedding Christianity into its socio-historical context is the discovery of the role that domestic piety performed in the development of Christian identity. Third, by reconstructing the domestic religiosity surrounding death, it will be argued that Roman women functioned as ritual specialists in matters of death and they transferred these roles with their conversion to Christianity. This specialization as funerary ritualists affirms a specific status and role for women in late-antique Christianity that has previously been neglected.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The goal of this chapter is to establish both a data set of primary material and a research framework—a compilation of methods or approaches with which to analyze the primary material to make the case that Roman women's domestic religiosity in terms of funerary practice was incorporated into Christian ritual practice, and therefore was integral to the formation of Christian identity in late antiquity. It is important that the methods chosen correspond with the assumptions of the thesis as outlined in chapter one. First, this is an examination into women's history that is intended to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, the lived expressions of Roman-Christian women in terms of their involvement with the rituals of death. Second, consistent with the specific focus of women's history, this study incorporates insights from socio-historical reconstruction because it supports embedding the lives of Christian women into their Roman context. Third, Christianity, consistent with current practices within socio-historical reconstruction, is regarded as part of a complex religious transformation of late-antique society rather than a unique, triumphant *sui generis* that vanquished the pagan world.[52] Fourth, there is a specific focus on domestic religiosity, which is part of a paradigm shift precipitated by scholars such as Brown and Frankfurter that more appropriately reflects the way religion functioned in late antiquity, and, in the context of this specific study, is

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52. For example, Frankfurter explains the dynamic that precludes 'unique-ness' for the 'great tradition' when he, states, "Aspects of little traditions become elevated and assimilated to broad systematizations maintained by literate priesthoods" because "little traditions will domesticate, localize, and quite often change significantly elements of the great tradition." *Roman Egypt*, 97. Jon Davies discusses further the "religious world" of the Romans as "in essence a pluralism, an about-to-be-worked-out set of competitive and complementary ideas, operating under the (to us) surprisingly permissive culture of Hellenism, with its extraordinary competence in the import and export of religious, philosophical and aesthetic ideas." *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7.

more appropriate in terms of the association of death and women within the domestic sphere.

Limitations and Parameters

Importantly, the research framework of this thesis requires realistic parameters. There are obvious limitations and constraints in reconstructing a "type" or "exemplum" of late-antique funerary practice, whether Roman or Christian. Certainly wide variations existed in rituals surrounding death according to region and class, especially given the broad time span of this study, 200–800 C.E. For example, toward the end of late antiquity, as the empire crumbled in the West, "new people were looking to Christianity for guidance in an increasingly troubled world."[53] Subsequent centuries would reveal "a scattering of more or less separate Christian communities in the West, all of whom struggled to make sense of sickness, death, and dying within their own understanding of the Christian message, some in conformity with Roman antiquity, others not."[54]

In addition to the variations in funerary ritual, availability and types of data have a bearing on this study. Scholars agree that literary texts by themselves are insufficient; they also contain biases—for example, androcentrism, idealism, and elitism—and must be balanced with evidence from epigraphy and material culture.[55] Nor is it possible to paint an accurate picture of women and Christian funeral practice in late antiquity solely

53. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 46.

54. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 46–47.

55. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek, "Introduction," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), xiv.

using material culture and epigraphy; these carry biases of a similar sort. The best to be hoped for is a reconstruction of Roman-Christian funerary practices reflective of as many types of evidence as possible.

There is also the matter of fair representation of the population under examination. Admittedly much of the available evidence comes from upper classes. In addition, there is the problem of accurately identifying material evidence as ‘Christian.’ For example, the material culture designated as ‘Christian art and archaeology’ dated prior to the Constantinian era (before 337 C.E.) has been found to carry bias. The standards set out by modern investigators have failed to “recognize the potential for non-biblical figures to be representative of authentic early Christian people.”[56] Robin M. Jensen explains that material culture “with more ambiguous content” is better identified as “Christian” by its “placement in Christian sites,” for instance, in church buildings; however, the evidence is often no longer *in situ*.[57] Furthermore, scholars like David Balch and Carolyn Osiek acknowledge the broad multi-cultural matrix in which early Christian families developed when they state, “no longer can one be satisfied with simplistic generalizations and cultural stereotypes of ‘the Romans,’ ‘the Jews,’ or ‘the Christians.’[58]

In terms of Roman funerary rituals and monuments, Valerie M. Hope provides additional advice.[59] She argues that reconstruction of Roman funeral practices cannot be

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56. Janet Tulloch, “Art and Archaeology as an Historical Resource for the Study of Women in Early Christianity: An Approach for Analyzing Visual Data,” *Feminist Theology* 12.3 (2004): 284–85.

57. Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 16.

58. Balch and Osiek, “Introduction,” xv.

59. Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (New York: Continuum, 2009). Also by Valerie Hope: “Contempt and Respect: the Treatment of the Corpse in Ancient

based on evidence drawn from only "a handful of sources."[60] However, this is the current state of the research because scholarship is still in the process of developing the actual database and interpreting this data. Furthermore, it is virtually impossible to determine whether a particular ritual was the result of tradition or belief, or whether "aspects of the rites were minority or majority practices or, in the case of some rites, were even only confined to Rome's distant past" and therefore not indicative of late antiquity at all.[61] In other words, as far as Roman and early Christian funerals are concerned, 'one size does not fit all.' Rather, the late-antique practices surrounding death (which we know to be 'domestic' in nature) were influenced, as Hope attests, by "social factors such as wealth, status, gender and age," which in turn were subject to change during the period under study.[62] Moreover, while there is ample evidence for how the Romans "gave public expression to loss,"[63] trying to relate "this evidence to the individual's emotional reality is problematic" since "mourning and grief can be two separate and different experiences; public behavior may not mirror private thoughts."[64] Consequently, scholarship is challenged, not only in evaluating how the evidence tends to "distort and idealize the impact of grief," but also how much real sentiment can be discerned in material culture and how much is a depiction of convention, social expectation, or simply artistic

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Rome" in V. M. Hope and E. Marshall, eds. 104–27, *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*. (New York: Routledge, 2000).

60. Hope, *Roman Death*, 93.

61. Hope, *Roman Death*, 93.

62. Hope, *Roman Death,* 93–94.

63. Hope lists the following: "condolence letters, consolation poems, philosophical discourses, poetic laments, epitaphs and tombstones." *Roman Death*, 121–22.

64. Hope, *Roman Death,* 121–22.

construct.[65] Ultimately, these many considerations signal caution as the reconstruction of Roman-Christian funerals proceeds.

Methodological Specifications

Concerning the data set of primary material, this study will examine various literary and material artifacts, dated between 100 B.C.E.–800 C.E.[66] to gain an understanding of the Roman practices surrounding death/burial as well as the specific performance of women in that context. This will be duplicated with the Christian material 100–800 C.E. The inclusion of material artifacts is required due to the topics associated with the study. As noted in chapter one, the lives of women, and the practices of domestic religiosity are not major subjects of discussion within the androcentric texts of the male élites. However, domestic religiosity utilized material culture, and the subjects of women and death are topics for visual depiction. So, material culture becomes an invaluable resource in this study. The literary material will be varied and diverse; again, this is because domestic religiosity was not a major subject for philosophical or theological discussion; rather, it emerges as part of the assumed social context. This also means the corpus of texts will be expanded to include documents that are more reflective of everyday life. In the sections to follow, discussion will be provided.

In reference to a research framework, the data set of primary material itself necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that permits a socio-historical analysis of both literary works and material culture. Further, as noted in chapter one, scholarship

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65. Hope, *Roman Death,* 121–22.

66. Though the focus of this thesis is on the period 200–800 C.E., some earlier material is included under the assumption that practices are slow to change.

involving women's history, domestic religiosity, and socio-historical criticism, incorporates assorted hermeneutic strategies and various theories from the social sciences. Again, discussions in the following sections of this chapter will provide more detail on the specific combination of methodological approaches employed in this study.

Literary Texts Concerning Women, Death, and Burial

Literary Texts – The Data Set

This section identifies the primary literary data[67] related to women in funerary practices that exist in the Christian canon and beyond as well as in Greco-Roman scholarship. The sources are diverse and widely scattered—as crumbs, so to speak—and will require some elaboration to clarify the complexity of their interconnection.

As noted, domestic religiosity, like funeral ritual, is not a major topic in the androcentric texts of the male élites. However, descriptions of funeral practices are found in various narratives because they are part of the social matrix. For example, the New Testament canon, especially in connection with the death of Jesus, mentions lamentation over the deceased, mourning women, women as witness at the burial, and women visiting the tomb of the deceased on the third day following death.[68] New Testament apocryphal texts tell of women visiting the gravesite and imply they are bringing gifts of food and drink or possibly ointments and spices to administer to the corpse.[69] We know that these

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67. Note that the emphasis is on *primary* textual sources for details of ancient Greco-Roman rituals. However, *secondary* sources will certainly provide interpretation and corroboration of the data.

68. Acts 9.37, 39; Luke 23.27, 56 –24.1; Mark 15.47,16.1; Matt 28.1; John 20.11.

69. See *The Gospel of Peter*, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, edited and translated by M. R. James (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924–26), 12.50–13.57.

customs were characteristic of mourning women in the Mediterranean world because these same customs are narrated in Greek and Roman literature. For example, Homer's epic poem, the *Iliad*, discusses women in lamentation, weeping, wailing, and moaning upon the death of a hero.[70] Seneca and Virgil both specify that it is the *matri*—the wife, mother, the nearest relative—who sits with a dying person until the time of death when she gives the deceased the last kiss; also, in *Aeneid 9,* Virgil mentions the convention of the *matri* as the one to sing the lament for the deceased person.[71] Therefore, the data set of primary texts will include various literary descriptions of funeral practices that appear in the Greek, Roman, and Christian literature.

The data set will also include historical accounts that often note perceived 'abuses' with the rituals, but corroborate details found in the above literature. For instance, Roman historian Plutarch—writing in Greek in the first century C.E.—indicates his concern for the behavior of women at public funerals and recalls that even *Solon's Laws* (sixth century B.C.E. Athens) decried the "harsh and barbaric" behaviors of mourning women at funerary events.[72] At the turn of the common era, Cicero in Rome repeated these same charges against women and endorsed *Solon's Laws*, especially those limiting the "public appearances of the women, their mourning, and their festivals"; he

70. Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by A. T. Murray and William F. Wyatt, vol. 2, in LCL 171. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925). 24.880–940.

71. For reference to a mother's role at the time of death see Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Marciam* (On consolation to Marcia), translated by John W. Basore, in vol. 2 of *Moral Essays*, LCL 254 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 3.2. Also Virgil, *Aeneid 4*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough and revised by J. P. Goold, LCL 63 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 684–85. Further, Virgil, *Aeneid 9,* translated by H. R. Fairclough and revised by J. P. Goold, LCL 64 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 481.

72. Plutarch, *The Life of Solon*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin, in vol.1 of *Parallel Lives*, LCL 46 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 12.4.434.

also censored women's "laceration of the flesh," lamentations, and wailing at funerals other than for their own family members, and restricted visiting tombs of non-family "except at the time of interment."[73]

The Church Fathers of the third and fourth centuries also voice concerns about the conduct of women at funerals. Similar to the historical accounts, the letters and homilies of certain ecclesiastical leaders are focused on perceived 'abuses'; however, we can infer using the criterion of embarrassment, that these descriptions of women's actions reflect real practices of this time. For instance, in the fourth century Basil, bishop of Caesarea, denounces the conduct of women at celebrations for the dead and in particular at the martyr-shrine in his own city.[74] In fact, there exist various other ecclesiastical documents written by clergy in late antiquity that, due to the criterion of embarrassment, have significance for this study.[75]

Literary texts dealing with the lives of Christian martyrs and saints (hagiography) also contribute to the data set. While analysis of this literature does not deal with domestic rituals, the women's actions in reference to the veneration of martyrs mimic

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73. Plutarch, "Solon," 21.5, 464.

74. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Ebriosos* (On Drunkards), edited by Phillip Schaff and Henry Wallace, Homily 14 in vol. 8 of NPNF, series 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), lxiv.

75. For example, John Chrysostom, in the fourth century, writes eight homilies admonishing women for their activities at funeral events. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John,* edited by Philip Schaff, in vol. 14 of *NPNF-1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889): 62.4, 63.1, 85.5, 85.6, 86.1; *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrew*s in same volume: 4.7, 4.8, 31.4, Another example is Augustine's letter written in the early fifth century discussing the grave offerings brought regularly by women to Christian cemeteries. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, translated by Maria Boulding in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century–Part 1*, 2nd ed. (New York: New City Press, 1996), 6.2.2, 134–36. Also Gregory of Nyssa, bishop of Cappadocia in the late fourth century, writes a detailed account of his sister's Christian funeral and criticizes the decorum of the men and women in attendance. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina* in *Lives of Roman Christian Women,* edited and translated by Carolinne White (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 26.40, 27.41.

domestic funeral practices. The martyr texts do affirm that women collected and transferred martyrs' relics (bones, clothing), made pilgrimages to the sites of relics to present offerings, and venerated and even sponsored martyr-shrines.[76] Sozomen, the early church historian, affirms in his writings that wealthy Roman women from Constantinople, Jerusalem, Rome, and elsewhere in the empire were very active in the patronage of martyrs.[77] Therefore, these texts not only establish a connection between women and death; they provide information about the actions of women in terms of memorialization that perhaps have their origin in familial funerary practices.

Often neglected by scholarship are the various sermons that clarify ritual practices and the proceedings of church synods and councils held from the fourth to ninth centuries. For example, in several sermons, Caesarius, bishop of Arles, attempted to clarify his congregation's practices regarding *viaticum* and prayers over the dead.[78] This process of clarification is also seen in the periodical synods in which the bishops of the church assembled to debate, formalize, and legislate Christian practices, including practices dealing with death and burial. Investigation reveals that no less than five synods

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76. Brown, *Cult of the Saints,* 33-34, 88-89, and 98. See also "Acta Maximiliani," in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, edited and translated by Herbert Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, rep. 2000), 3–4.248. As well see MacMullen, *Second Church*, 47.

77. MacMullen, *Second Church,* 46. Also Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, vol. 2 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 9.2, 2.1–2. Regarding the patronage of Melania the Younger and the empress Eudocia the wife of Theodocius II, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "Claims on the Bones of Saint Stephen: The Partisans of Melania and Eudocia," *CH* 51.2 (Jun 1982): 141–56.

78. Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 48–55. See also Caesarius of Arles, *Saint Caesarius of Arles Sermons*, edited by Roy Joseph Deferrari, vol. 31 of *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1956, repr. in *Scribd* eBook, 2001), Sermon 50.1.253–54, http://www.scribd.com/doc/ 53598606/The-Fathers-of-the-Church-A-new-translation-Volume-31 (accessed July 28, 2011).

from 383 to 691 address matters of feeding/administering the eucharist as *viaticum* (preparation for one's journey, in the Christian sense, into the afterlife), during fatal illness, as well as *post mortem.*[79] Furthermore, the books of church orders— the *Didascalia Apostolorum* of the third century and the *Apostolic Constitutions* of the fourth century—instruct deaconesses to minister to sick and dying women, presumably meaning to care for both "body and soul"; therefore, we can assume female deacons were administering the eucharist as *viaticum*.[80] These sermons, rules, and regulations—read through the hermeneutics of suspicion and the criterion of embarrassment—provide some understanding of actual practice.

In passing, it is worth mentioning the liturgies found in the *sacramentaries*—books of rituals describing the formalized prayers, rites, and procedures for the sick, dying, and the dead—that appear in monastic institutions during the seventh to ninth centuries.[81] Additionally, there were confraternity books and hymnals defining the

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79. Refer to the "Synod of Hippo" held in 383 C.E. recorded in: *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, vol. 14 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900) where canon 4 states, "The eucharist shall not be given to dead bodies." This canon was repeated at the Councils of Carthage in 397 and 525, at the Synod of Auxerre (Gaul) in 578, and again at the Council of Trullo (Constantinople) in 691 where the ruling was stated more harshly in canon 83. For the Synod of Auxerre, see *Concilia Galliae,* edited by Carlo de Clerq, CCSL 148A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1963), 267n72 regarding canon 36 (women may not receive communion with the bare hand); canon 37 (women may not touch the sacred linen used at the consecration); canon 42 (every woman must use a linen cloth—*dominicalis*—over her hand at communion).

80. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, translated from the Syriac by Margaret Dunlop Gibson (London: Clay & Sons, Cambridge University Press, 1903), 14, 79. See also *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, edited by Arthur Vööbus, CSCO 407 (Louvain: Skretariat du SCO, 1979), 7, 3.19.

81. The process of formalizing the *sacramentaries* is complex. Along with the formalization of prayers, rites, and ritual specialists in reference to the dying and dead, the process also involves several interrelated elements including procedures and care for the sick, which is further complicated due to the complex matrix surrounding illness—a matrix that included magic, folk remedies, and medical practices that were administered by ordinary people and various specialists including Christian holy persons, saints, and monastics and located in diverse places such as the home, monastery, shrine, and hospital. These details are beyond the scope of this study, which remains a preliminary exploration. In the meantime, for a

psalms, prayers, and singing of masses for deceased members of voluntary associations from the seventh century into the middle ages.[82] However, while these materials do exist, they will be referred to only briefly in this study. They lie beyond the scope of the current research (post late antiquity) and could be examined in a future project.

To summarize, the data set of literary evidence consists of the following: 1) New Testament; 2) New Testament apocrypha; 3) Greco-Roman writings; 4) writings of the Church Fathers; 5) ecclesiastical letters and decrees; 6) hagiography of the martyrs and saints, and 7) proceedings of synods and councils.[83]

Literary Texts – The Approach

As noted in chapter one, the primary literary sources are largely androcentric; therefore, in order to evaluate and interpret these sources, hermeneutical devices are essential. Two devices already discussed are: Fiorenza's hermeneutics of suspicion, and the criterion of embarrassment cultivated by New Testament scholars and applied by academics such as Luise Schottroff. An example of how each tools is applied follows.

First there is an analysis of a passage from one of Basil of Caesarea's homilies. In this fourth century sermon, Basil objects to women's singing and dancing in the context of funerary rituals, in particular around martyr's shrines.[84]

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good overview of the *sacramentaries* of the western church during the eighth and ninth centuries, see Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 15, 29, 50, 86–87.

82. The "confraternities of prayer for the dead" (including votive masses) originated among the Irish, Franks, and Anglo-Saxons after 750 C.E. as "a new type of social institution." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 99–102.

83. Again, additional research on the process of formalizing the liturgical *sacramentaries* would expand this literary evidence to include books of church orders and the confraternity of prayer books and hymnals especially in the area of Christian practices associated with the sick, the dying, and the dead.

84. Basil, *Homilia in Ebriosos*, lxiv.

> Decent women ought to have been sitting in their homes, piously reflecting on future judgment. Instead to this, certain wanton women, forgetful of the fear of God, flung their coverings from their heads, despising God, and in contempt of His angels, lost to all shame before the gaze of men, shaking their hair, trailing their tunics, sporting with their feet, with immodest glances and unrestrained laughter, went off into a wild dance. They invited all the riotous youth to follow them, and kept up their dances in the Basilica of the Martyrs before the walls of Caesarea, turning hallowed places into the workshop of the their unseemliness. They sang indecent songs, and befouled the ground with their unhallowed thread. They got a crowd of lads to stare at them, and left no madness undone.[85]

If we apply the hermeneutics of suspicion a very different understanding emerges. Basil describes women's behavior in terms of "hysteria." Given that in late antiquity the trope of the 'hysterical woman'[86] was used as part of the rhetoric between competing groups and given the androcentric nature ('male gaze') of this particular text, Fiorenza's hermeneutics of suspicion adjusts the reading to acquire more "accurate historical information about the status and role of women in actual life."[87] Application of this critical analysis tool makes it apparent that Basil is referring to customary funerary rituals typically performed by Roman women visiting any tomb—that is, there is purpose for the

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85. Basil, *Homilia in Ebriosos*, lxiv.

86. For the meaning of "hysterical" in reference to women in the ancient world, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3–5. MacDonald contends that the "stereotypical perceptions about women" were reflected in the writings of Celsus, Pliny the Younger, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, Lucius Apuleius, Lucian of Samosata, Galen of Pergamum, Philo of Alexandria, and others. Greco-Roman public opinion was that "women were inclined toward *excesses* in matters of religion" and labeled, therefore, as 'hysterical' from the Greek πάριστρος, also translated as "frenzied" or "out of control." *Early Christian Women*, 3. According to MacDonald, there was an ambivalent attitude in this description: on the one hand "female nature … [had] gone morally and intellectually awry, with weakness and vulnerability inherent in the female sex"; on the other hand women were believed to hold "religious talents … [that] were both admired and held in great suspicion." *Early Christian Women*, 3–4.

87. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 108.

women's visual, oral, and dramatic display.[88] It is part of traditional domestic practices associated with death. Furthermore, the hermeneutics of suspicion raises the possibility that these women (presumably Christian) are not 'hysterical' at all; they are more likely engaged in the type of behavior including lamentation that is consistent with the funeral practices of Roman women in the late-ancient Mediterranean world.[89] The women are, in effect, relocating domestic practices to the Christian shrines of martyr-saints.

The second example involves the analysis of text from the fifth century taken from *The Confessions* by St. Augustine—specifically his account of his mother Monica's regular visits to burial sites in Carthage to which she brings offerings for deceased Christians.[90] Augustine's description of Monica's behavior calls for the criterion of embarrassment as follows: presumably Augustine would not have wanted to admit his own mother was involved in funerary gifting, which he had described as "too much like their pagan counterpart," unless it was true. Therefore, since Augustine continues with his description in spite of the embarrassment, it can be assumed that Monica and, by extension, other Christian women, did in fact participate in funerary rituals commemorating the dead, such as taking food and drink as offerings to cemeteries.[91]

In addition to using hermeneutical devices to evaluate the primary texts, these sources must be read for women using heuristic categories that are representative of Roman women in late antiquity. As indicated earlier, prior scholarship focused on women

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88. Basil, *Homilia in Ebriosos*, lxiv.

89. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 46–47.

90. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 6.2.2, 134–36.

91. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 6.2.2, 134–36.

in terms of official ‘clerical’ roles, For this study, however, the following categories consider women: 1) in kinship relationships as wives, mothers, widows, sisters, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, daughters, aunts, and grandmothers; 2) in domestic funerary practices as ritual singers, lamenters, dancers, musicians, mourners, givers of gifts, and hostesses of banquets; 3) in the household (*domus*)[92] as managers and administrators of slaves, food supplies, clothing, and general household provisions;[93] 4) in the *familia*[94] as organizers of daily worship and guardians of domestic shrines; 5) in life cycle events (in this case, dying and death) as healers and caregivers; 6) in family identity-building as the custodians, models, and teachers of cultural, religious, and social tradition,[95] and 7) in the economic realm as patrons of burial sites, *collegia*, public shrines, and martyria.

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92. For this thesis *domus* will be defined as, “the physical house, the household including family and slaves, the broad kinship group including agnates (those belonging to the father’s bloodline) and cognates (those belonging to the mother’s bloodline), ancestors and descendants, and the patrimony” inclusive of those living together. Richard P. Saller, “*Familia, Domus*, and the Roman Conception of the Family,” *Phoenix* 38.4 (Winter 1984): 337, 342.

93. Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 169–70. The implication here is that women, as managers of the household and therefore managers of domestic goods, would necessarily have jurisdiction over what was prepared and taken to feed the dead and leave as grave gifts at the tombs.

94. For this thesis, the meaning of *familia* will accept the definitions of Osiek and Saller. Osiek describes *familia* as “the blood family, freedmen/women, slaves, and others attached to the household).” Carolyn Osiek, “Roman and Christian Burial Practices and the Patronage of Women,” in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, edited by Laurie Brink and Deborah Green (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 247. Saller corroborates this broad perception of *familia*: “the wider kinship group encompassed by the *domus*” (see n92 above). Saller, “*Familia*,” 337, 342.

95. Osiek and MacDonald discuss the position of authority (*prostasia)* of women in the “lesser” social entity (micro version) of the Roman state, the household, where the greater social entity is the city managed by men, *A Women’s Place*, 151. Harry Maier argues that the private realm of the household was “the setting for transmitting ideas, testing allegiances”; households “contributed to self-definition and reinforced social identity.” Harry O. Maier, “Religious Dissent, Heresy, and Households in Late Antiquity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 49.1 (Mar 1995): 54. Consider this hypothesis: if the household was a key social unit in the forming of Roman identity and women were the managers and guardians of the cultural and religious life of the household, then it must follow that women were integral to the building and preservation of Roman identity. The observation may be expanded to include the role of women in Christian households where Christian death rituals were performed—women were integral in the forging and maintenance of Christian identity.

Also, pertaining to funerary rituals, heuristic categories are required for interpreting and comparing texts that speak about death/burial practices used in the domestic realm, and practices that eventually became known as ‘Christian’ rites for death and burial. Therefore, funerary rituals (liturgy) mentioned in the primary texts will be considered first as ‘performance’: reciting, singing, praying, anointing, playing of musical instruments, gesture, movement/dance, use of color, light, and fragrances.

Second, funerary rituals will be read in terms of the obsequies carried out for the deceased person: preparation for death, the last kiss, closing the eyes, calling by name (*conclamatio*), washing and anointing, dressing the corpse, laying-in-state, funeral procession with lamentation, disposal of the corpse, and post-funeral practices including regular commemoration celebrations. Notably these obsequies appear again in the five stages of the Vatican Gelasian—the *sacramentary* written up by the nuns of Chelles and adopted by the church ca. 750 as the Christian rites for the sick, the dying, and the dead.[96]

Non-Literary Texts Concerning Women, Death, and Burial

Non-Literary Texts –The Data Set

Complementing the literary sources from late antiquity is another grouping of primary data— non-literary written forms comprising funerary inscriptions, documentary papyri, graffiti, and votive texts. As verified by Ute Eisen in 2000, the use of this particular data provides an opportunity for the enhancement of women’s history. She

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96. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 102–03 and 106. According to Paxton, the five stages defined in the Vatican Gelasian include: 1) washing, dressing, and laying out of the body; 2) a ceremony prior to the procession to the gravesite; 3) a ceremony before the burial; 4) a ceremony after the burial, and 5) a final commendation.

stated, "To this point they have been only marginally incorporated in research on women … and they are urgently in need of investigation."[97] However, to explain how inscriptions, papyri, graffiti, and votive texts can serve as useful additions to the data set of this study, some elaboration is required.

Inscription is typically part of funerary monuments and grave markers; it is the writing found on "stelae, funerary altars, sarcophagi and ash chests," which "survive in large numbers and have been extensively catalogued,"[98] Documentary papyri, though less accessible to scholars, include Roman and Christian private letters, business contracts, legal and other official documents, sales records, and inventories.[99] Graffiti from early-to-late antiquity comprise the scribble writing appearing in places like the catacombs of Rome, under the church of San Sebastiano, on the walls of the necropolis under St. Peter's, and in the house church at Dura-Europos.[100] Votive texts refer to public assertions (often inscribed in stone) of a duty done, especially to the Roman gods or to God/Jesus or one or more saints; most often these votives advertise "the virtue of *pietas* [duty, devotion] … in the same way that other virtues, such as *probitas* [honesty, good character], can be seen as being to the fore in the public inscriptions."[101] Votives will be discussed in more detail in the 'material culture' section below.

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97. Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 20.

98. Hope, *Roman Death*, 213n12.

99. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 20.

100. Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 251–66.

101. This is all part of evergetism. The term evergetism or 'euergetism' from the Greek *εὐεργετέω* refers to Hellenistic 'generosity' and in practical terms was the performance of philanthropy, benefaction, or patronage. Mark Pobjoy, "Building Inscriptions in Republican Italy: Euergetism, Responsibility, and

Among the large numbers of funerary inscriptions from various regions of the Roman world, several examples show that women were involved as patrons of burial sites, managers of cemeteries, and patronesses of voluntary associations. One inscription on a sarcophagus lid dated to 425 C.E. states that "a certain Theodosius … purchased a burial place in the cemetery at Salona from the presbyter Flavia Vitalia …a *matrona* … a freeborn married woman."[102] That is, Flavia Vitalia, acting as a presbyter (priest) owned or at least administered the sale of cemetery spaces at Salona in an area we know today as Croatia. Another inscription dated to the second or third century and found in Smyrna, the ancient city on the coast of Anatolia (modern Izmir, Turkey), names a certain Rufina, "who was following local custom when she made fines for violation of her household's grave payable to the 'most sacred treasury' of Smyrna … and to an association … of which she was a leader or benefactor [patron]."[103]

Papyrus documentation (personal letters, official documents, prayers, and so on), as mentioned above, is highly valuable since it could offer insight into the everyday activities of people, and conceivably provide information about family deaths and burials. Unfortunately, the corpus of these non-literary texts is still in the early stages of

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Civic Virtue" in *The Epigraphic Landscape of Roman Italy*, edited by Alison Cooley (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2000), 91–92.

102. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 132. Eisen states: "In the fifth century the administration of cemeteries had passed to church officials, including the presbyters …the sale of burial places was … a duty belonging to the presbyters" and since the abbreviation *prb*, "commonly used for the title 'presbyter' in Latin inscriptions," was inscribed next to Flavia Vitalia's name, we may assume she worked as a presbyter or priest in the role of "burial plot administrator." *Women Officeholders*, 132. The inscription is from Henri Leclercq, "Inscriptions Latines Chrétiennes," DACL VII/I (1926) 694–850, at 768.

103. Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Association, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 135.

translation, cataloguing, and publication, and not easily accessible.[104] Therefore, utilization of papyri will be limited in this study.

Ancient graffiti, common scribblings, were found on the walls of the *triclia* (dining room) under San Sebastiano and on the walls of the necropolis under St. Peter's in Rome.[105] Interpretation of the graffiti (dated 260 to 320 C.E.) has revealed reference to food offerings for the deceased, demonstrating "the fact of and characteristics of a large cult of the dead in early Christianity," and shows that meals were actually eaten in these locations to honor family members and/or the holy dead (the saints) buried there during the fourth century.[106]

In review then, the data set of primary non-literary texts for this study includes: funerary inscriptions, graffiti, and votive texts. However, because using this type of data is relatively new for scholars, and because appropriate interpretation requires contextualization, for the purposes of this study, my analysis will be limited to those inscriptions, graffiti, and votive texts that have been assessed by previous scholars.[107]

Non-Literary Texts –The Approach

By what methods should non-literary evidence be handled? Eisen cautions that the central limitation in the reading of funerary inscriptions is that "the epithets that are applied to the deceased are often formulaic and tributary to social and religious norms."[108]

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104. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 1.

105. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 251, 259.

106. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 257.

107. Scholarly investigation of these primary sources becomes an excellent subject for future research, especially as they pertain to women and funerary ritual in late antiquity.

108. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 19.

However, "to the extent that they can be stripped of their formulaic character, [they] remain unique testimonies to daily life" in the ancient world.[109] Eisen's approach to epigraphical analysis is the application of "a text-critical apparatus [which] adds variant readings, emendations, conjectures, parallel traditions, and remarks" to each inscription; further, she advises that related "epigraphic and literary sources" are useful as witnesses "insofar as they contribute to the interpretation of the inscriptional evidence" and insofar as the scholar realizes the dating of associated sources can only be "approximate."[110]

Two additional considerations are important. One is that publication in English of archaeological resources is limited, thus producing a situation resulting in a lack in coverage of inscriptions.[111] Catalogues in Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and German are far more common, and in projected future research these catalogues will be recovered and analyzed. Second, as stressed by current scholarship in women's history, every effort must be taken to ensure contextuality when interpreting non-literary texts; evaluation of Christian inscriptions, and graffiti is valid only if the sources are fitted back into what Snyder calls, "the social matrix" of the late Roman period during the time of Christianity's evolution.[112] In other words, "inscriptions are no more an immediate reflection of the reality of ancient life than are literary sources," and neither of these can be considered in isolation.[113]

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109. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 20.

110. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 20.

111. Snyder *Ante Pacem*, 1.

112. See Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 14-15. Refer also to Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 15–21.

113. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 19.

Material Culture Concerning Women, Death, and Burial

The data set for material culture is comprised of the ‘things’—visuals crafted or built by human workmanship—that the ancients left behind in an effort to symbolize their understandings about death, burial, and memorial. This material/visual culture falls into three general categories— art, architectural forms, and artifacts. As categories for this study, *art* will include funerary relief sculpture and wall painting (*frescoes*); *architectural forms* will consist of funerary monuments, tombs and sanctuaries (basilicas, churches, shrines, and martyria), and *artifacts* will refer to the grave gifts, votive offerings, and funerary pottery left at burial sites. Following the identification of the data set for each of the material/visual culture categories, a general methodological stratagem will be offered.

Funerary Art – The Data Set

This section examines funerary *art* of two types: relief sculpture and wall painting. First, funerary relief sculpture from the Roman period is typically the decoration on sarcophagi, *stelae* (grave markers), and ash chests. While most of the decoration features mythological imagery, there are some representations that confirm the literary descriptions of the funeral ritual. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

A second type of funerary *art* involves wall painting, the *frescoes* found decorating the places of the dead—tombs and catacombs—but also displayed on the walls of house churches and basilicas. In terms of *frescoes*, those most significant for this study are the banquet scenes, specifically found on the walls in the household chambers (*cubicula* and *arcosolia*) of the catacomb of SS. Marcellino and Pietro from the early

fourth century.[114] These scenes connect women to meals held in reference to funeral rituals. Again, this will be a subject for analysis in later chapters of this study.

Funerary Architecture – The Data Set

Architecture to celebrate and memorialize the dead increased in popularity throughout the Roman world after the second century, likely influenced to some degree by the emperor Hadrian's love for Greek culture.[115] This section discusses funerary architectural forms including: monuments, tombs, and sanctuaries, particularly the architectural modifications made to these forms for the purpose of holding funerary banquets that involved feasting with the dead.[116] The additional or modified architectural forms were typically built inside or close to particular monuments and tombs. These forms included: permanent *mensae* (dining tables) in various shapes, hearths for cooking, water fountains, cisterns, feeding tubes or pipes, and *amphorae* (narrow-necked vessels partially buried and protruding from the ground).[117] The architectural evidence supports

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114. Janet Tulloch, "Women Leaders in Family Funerary Banquets," in *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, by Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 174–75.

115. Susan Walker, *Memorials to the Roman Dead* (London: British Museums, 1985), 17.

116. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Housing the Dead: The Tomb as House in Roman Italy," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, edited by L. Brink and D. Green (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 47–48. One important function of funerary rites in the home or funerary art at the family tomb was "the reintegration of the family group, shattered by the brutality of loss"; the family's previous public "declarations of identity and status" are now turned inward (private) in the form of the tomb/monument, which serves "as a public representation of the intimate unit of the family." Wallace-Hadrill, "Housing the Dead," 47–48.

117. As Jensen explains, the water fountains were used for cooking and cleaning up as well as for ritual purification after visiting the dead; the feeding pipe, placed above a coffin or in the lid of a sarcophagus at the head end, was for the purpose of sharing libation or food with the deceased. Robin M. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead: From the *Mensa* to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, edited by L. Brink and D. Green (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 117–20. For further details regarding "cultic provisions" found at gravesites, see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 51, 136.

information from literary sources and other material culture (wall paintings, for instance) that meals for the dead were both prepared and shared *in situ*. For example, near Ostia at Isola Sacra, a delta island crowded with roadside tombs, are many surface burials that are marked by *amphorae* buried up to their necks—the *amphorae* were conduits through which the living could feed the dead.[118] Isola Sacra also incorporates stone dining couches (*triclinia* and *biclinia*) near the doorways of the tombs or situated in a central area of the cemetery.[119]

Similar architectural modifications are evident inside many of the sanctuaries of late antiquity—churches, basilicas, shrines, and martyria. For example, a basilica built in the 400s by the bishop Alexander was intended "primarily to house funeral banquets and private memorial services"; it contained the bishop's own grave, graves of nine of his predecessors, and numerous other "ordinary" burials.[120] Furthermore, the nave and aisles of the basilica "featured several semicircular stone couches [*triclinia*] for the celebration of funeral meals."[121] In the same way, architecture at martyr-shrines was modified to "accommodate pilgrims bringing food offerings to the tombs of their spiritual, rather than their biological, ancestors [the saints]"; larger gathering spaces allowed for feasting, cooking facilities assisted in the food preparation, and stone *mensae* provided for dining.[122] Examples of these large-scale complexes housing not only the martyr-shrine,

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118. However, as Osiek observes, the surface burials at the Isola Sacra necropolis disappeared in the mid 1970s. Osiek, "Roman and Christian," 248–49.

119. Osiek, "Roman and Christian," 118–21.

120. Jensen, "Dining," 126.

121. Jensen, "Dining," 126.

122. Jensen, "Dining," 128, 130.

but also banquet facilities and tombs are seen in three of Rome's basilicas: *S. Agnes fuori le Mura, SS. Marcellino e Pietro,* and *S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura*.[123]

In sum, funerary art and architecture provide visual evidence of funeral rituals in late antiquity. They also demonstrate the continuity of specific practices such as funeral banquets—and it is in this context that the evidential art and architecture will be examined. To restate, this study is preliminary and explorative in terms of discovering the roles of women within the Christian adaptation and adoption of domestic funerary rites. The full investigation of the adaptation of banquet meals to the Christian context in terms of individual death and the cult of the martyrs is beyond this study.

Funerary Artifacts – The Data Set

Evidence of funerary rituals and women's participation becomes apparent from the wide variety of ritual artifacts discovered in archaeological excavations of tombs. These artifacts are objects associated with the ancient custom of placing gifts in the tomb along with the corpse or of bringing gifts or offerings to the deceased on *post-mortem* visits. The votive texts (rarely in Latin, more often in Greek) were simply words or brief messages (in an epigraph paid by someone well-to-do, or scratched on a stone as graffiti by the common Roman); these words sometimes accompanied a votive gift but often had to do with a suppliant's wish, promise, or indication of a promise fulfilled along with some sentiment of gratitude.[124] The type of artifact (votive) and the decoration found on

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123. Jensen, "Dining," 132.

124. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 85–86. MacMullen notes that the Latin term for the promise/vow was usually *votum solvit*, "so-and-so fulfilled his/her vow" and by the third and fourth centuries the Christian votive text was often a wish for "salvation of the soul"; furthermore, the wealthy Roman-Christian might include an *ex voto* in a building, tomb, or monument inscription. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 174n25.

some artifacts both confirm the involvement of women in these customs either by depicting their practices (for example, in a painting) or through the specific gendered (domestic) nature of the gifts. Further discussion occurs in subsequent chapters.

Material Culture – The Approach

The approach for using material/visual culture, as a primary historical resource understands that material culture is only part of the "larger ongoing social discourse in the ancient Mediterranean world."[125] In terms of art culture, Tulloch argues that the art in antiquity "mimics the lively social interaction of life lived in close proximity to others," meaning that, "face to face contact was the primary means of human communication."[126] Consequently, art had 'a voice'; "the simplest way antique art accomplished its auditory capacity was through the writing or inscribing of speech on commercial and household items."[127] In other words, late-antique art had a "rhetorical nature" and "events were rarely presented as single scenes. Typically they occurred as 'registers,' one line of figures above another sometimes organized chronologically to tell a story."[128] Tulloch identifies questions the ancient artist/craftsperson (perhaps commissioned by a patron who would have some influence) likely needed to consider in creating the visual form:

- At what or at whom do the figures look?
- Is each figure looking at the same thing? Does any look at the viewer?
- What sort of hand gestures are the figures making?
- Do the figures hold anything? What is it?
- Are there inscriptions in or near the scene?

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125. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 277.

126. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 294.

127. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 295.

128. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 297.

- How are the words used? Are they descriptive text or speech?
- If speech, who does the speaking?
- Are there mythological figures present? If so, who? Or what?
- What time of day is it? How is time represented?
- Are the figures standing? Sitting? Or reclining?
- How is motion represented? …
- How is the status of individuals represented in the image?[129]

To understand this approach, therefore, the scholar will read funerary material culture with the auditory component in mind. The answers help one "determine the lines of communication, status, function, and inter-relationships" between the figures in the art.[130] Tulloch contends that ancient art "understood as social discourse … would have drawn the viewer in as a participant much the same way someone who overhears an interesting comment is drawn into a conversation."[131] Put differently, art and artifacts are "performative utterance" where the figures are depicted as having "the desire *to utter*, to give out a strongly felt emotion or desire" with which the viewer is invited to interact.[132]

In addition to 'reading' the image as performance, the physical location or context of the material culture "is almost as important as the object itself."[133] Vital information can be gleaned from the tomb environment in terms of inscriptions uttering speech either from family members to the deceased, or from the deceased to passersby—in other words, dialogue between the living and the dead.[134]

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129. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 297.

130. In addition, Tulloch adds another consideration. Was the dialogue taking place in real or imagined/mythical time? Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 297–98.

131. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 297–98.

132. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 299.

133. Tulloch agrees that finding the material culture *in situ* is of paramount importance if the archaeologist and historian hope to interpret the artifacts accurately. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 299.

134. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 300.

Therefore, in keeping with the current process of socio-historical reconstruction that embeds early Christian women within their late Roman context—and following scholars such as Tulloch who employ that very technique—material/visual culture relevant to this study, will at times be placed "in the foreground and documentary sources in the background as corroborative evidence."[135] Agreeing with this approach is Margaret Miles who explains that both visual imagery and textual documentation are important in the scholar's attempts to gain comprehension of the life and religiosity of ancient people; however, texts are associated with ideas, specifically the ideas of the élite, mainly male élites, while visual imagery offers a way to link the social conditions of a broader sampling of the people being studied, especially the women—consequently, the scholar needs both kinds of data, textual and visual.[136]

Equally vital when 'reading' material culture is the need to remember that material culture is socially constructed. It was "produced by subjective processes" involving economic, political, religious, and social factors in a certain historic period; if the image/culture has since been removed from its physical context, the scholar must 're-frame' or 're-construct' that physical site or context in an attempt to re-place the material/visual culture historically.[137] Colleen McDannell argues, funerary objects have no intrinsic meanings of their own but "are understood and gain significance when their

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135. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 300.

136. Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 29–30.

137. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 301.

'human' elements can be deciphered; this is because "meaning is culturally contingent," making it "imperative to place material culture in the society that produced it."[138]

Some final thoughts about interpreting material culture come from Ann Marie Yasin on "collective identity" and McDannell on "memory-building." Yasin maintains that the epigraphy, iconography, and architecture associated with family rituals around death were vital for the ancients in their construction of identity for *familia* and for the larger household unit, the *domus*.[139] The material culture of the funerary ritual (the tomb, funeral monuments, dining architecture) established and reinforced collective memory of the family's collective identity and importantly provided opportunities for the 'place-making' necessary to build identity. That is, by visiting the family tomb at regular times, and by celebrating and memorializing (with meals and material offerings) at the tomb in the company of family, the relatives of the deceased were able to make the site a *sacred* family space.[140] McDannell agrees that funerary art, architecture, and artifacts were "objects of memory" having the power to imaginatively reconstruct "the pieces of the past" for both participant and observer to effectively bind a sense of religiosity.[141] In other words, within these parameters, it seems that the continuation of a focus on cemeteries (the burial places) as 'places for creation of family identity' is vital to the continuation of practice (or domestic religiosity). We might surmise, therefore, that the combination of

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138. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 3–4.

139. Ann Marie Yasin, "Funerary Monuments and Collective Identity: From Roman Family to Christian Community" *The Art Bulletin* 87.3 (Sep 2005): 438-39.

140. Yasin, "Funerary Monuments," 439.

141. McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 39.

ritual, associated material culture, and the ‘places’ for death, burial, and commemoration were critical to the formation, first of Roman familial identity, and later of Christian identity. In both cases, women’s ritual specialization contributed to this sense of identity.

Contextualizing with the Social Sciences

Consistent with current practice in socio-historical studies, now that the data and methods for interpretation have been identified, the specific insights from the social sciences that will be used “as heuristic devices” for the reconstruction and comprehension of women and their roles in late antiquity will be outlined.[142] As noted already in chapter two, Karen Jo Torjesen was one of the first scholars to utilize “heuristic devices” from the social sciences in the historical reconstruction of early Christian women. Specifically, Torjesen drew upon anthropological theories regarding the “diffusion sphere” or “culture-continent” of the Mediterranean world.[143] In particular, Torjesen focused on one of the set of core values associated with the Mediterranean culture—the honor/shame system. In this system,

> Men competed among themselves to defend their masculinity. In order to maintain his honor a man had to be able to defend the chastity of women under his dominance and protection. If they lost their chastity it implied shame for the family as a whole. Women were therefore looked upon as potential sources of shame.[144]

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142. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 5.

143. These anthropological terms refer to the idea of a region in which specific social or cultural structures and institutions exist over a period of time. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Introduction” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, edited by Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996). 7.

144. Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, edited by R. L. Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 23.

This gendered concern over honor and shame reinforced a gendered division in terms of social places. There is the public, which is the place for men to acquire honor and a place where women may be subject to shame, and there is the private or domestic, which is the place where women are located to ensure their chastity. It is this gender dichotomy that provided Torjesen with the "heuristic devices" for her analysis, and this dichotomy between public/male and domestic/female continues to be useful for analysis. However, as recent studies have demonstrated, this dichotomy, as reconstructed by scholars like Torjesen, is too simplistic. There is much more complexity due to geographical differences in the Mediterranean world, historical variations, the shifting boundaries between public and domestic/private and even specific gendered ideas about honor and shame.[145] Therefore, the gendered separation between public/male and domestic/female, while useful "heuristic devices," must be nuanced to reflect the actual complexity of the late-antique Roman-Christian society under study. This is particularly the case in reference to domesticity, gender, and religious practices, which are the topics of analysis in this thesis.

To explain further: in ancient times, people usually handled life passages such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death in the home.[146] These significant human milestones happened to carry pollution deemed inconsistent with the official Roman religion of state

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145. Moxnes notes differences between Rome and Egypt, the Greek empire compared to the later Roman period, and social classes. Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," 24-37. On the complexity of the social constructs, 'public/men and private/women' as polarities, see Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 3-6. On how honor/shame functioned in antiquity, see Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 7-9.

146. Karen Stears, "Death Becomes Her: Gender and Athenian Death Ritual," in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, edited by Ann Suter (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 145-46. Of course, there were exceptions: the poor could not afford the privilege of these rites of passage, soldiers died and were buried on the battlefield, and criminals and traitors were denied burial.

and temple (the public sphere). Therefore, laws ensuring correct public worship, the *sacra publica*, legislated the social impact of death and the location of burial beyond the city boundary (*pomerium*).[147] The laws were meant to protect the high priests of Rome (the pontiffs) from ritual pollution and to maintain Roman ideals of "cosmic and civic order."[148] On the other hand, private religious practice was regulated by *sacra privata*, which gave responsibility for individual worship to the Roman household, the *familia*. Consequently, the life passages of death, birth, and so forth fell to the main caregivers of the *familia*, the women.[149] In terms of funerals, it meant that mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, and the family nurse became 'ritual specialists' whose duty it was to deal with death-pollution and to care for the dead in a fashion that protected the public, the, city, the empire from chaos and disharmony—the consequences of contamination.[150]

In other words, paradoxically, the concern to protect the honor and purity of the public sphere resulted in limiting the involvement of men in various religious practices (within the household/*domus*) and, at the same time, produced opportunities for women to acquire honor by performing specific ritual obligations associated with the private/ domestic sphere of the household. Consequently, the categories of 'domestic' and

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147. Roman divine worship was of two types/classes: "the *sacra* of the whole Roman people … performed either on behalf of the whole nation and at the expense of the state [*sacra publica*], or on behalf of individuals families, or *gentes*, which had also to defray their expenses [*sacra privata*] … all *sacra, publica* as well as *privata*, were superintended and regulated by the pontiffs." "Sacra," *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, edited by William Smith (1870), 993. This division of *sacra* is noted by Toynbee who explains that within the pontifical laws it was also stated that kinsfolk returning from a burial must undergo the rites of purification by fire and water (*suffitio*). Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 50

148. Hugh Lindsay, "Death Pollution and Funerals in the City of Rome," in *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, edited by Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2000), 152, 154–55.

149. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 169.

150. Lindsay, "Death-Pollution," 152.

'public' and the gender separation associated with these categories remain relevant "heuristic devices"; however, rather than operating with the simplistic dichotomies of previous understandings or assumptions, they will be nuanced to reflect the complexity of the Roman notions of *sacra publica* and *sacra privata*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the assumptions have been clarified, the limitations acknowledged, the data sets identified and their respective methodological approaches have been confirmed, in particular with regard to assistance from the social sciences. In other words, the technical background for this study is now in place. The next chapter will present an in-depth examination of what the research has uncovered to date in terms of the ancient Roman rituals surrounding death.

Chapter Three

Review of Existing Research

This chapter provides an assessment of the scholarship related to Greco-Roman funerary rituals in order to ascertain the role of women in funerary rituals as part of domestic religion. Surveying the research will locate what is currently known about ancient death rites relevant to my thesis. This study assumes that if death and burial were handled as part of domestic religiosity—the realm of women—then women, as Christians, continued as ritual specialists in the care of the dead. However, to demonstrate such likelihood it is necessary to learn what is already known in the present scholarship about Greco-Roman funeral practice.

This chapter will show that there are ‘gaps’ in the research to date. For example, there are relatively few studies in English on Greco-Roman funeral rites; there have been only two significant explorations on the topic[151] until recently and even then the current work is largely ‘descriptive,’ which, while completely necessary and vital to the study, still fails to address critical aspects of the question. For instance, the studies do not focus on how the rituals are part of domestic religiosity or *sacra privata*. They do not address the significant roles of women or they fail to highlight the significance of women in terms of lament. In virtually all cases, they do not frame the descriptions of funerary practices in terms of the creative tension between *sacra publica* and *sacra privata*; doing so could ultimately explain the rituals with respect to mortality, familial and social stability, and transformation of relationships, which in turn would provide greater

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151. Early scholarship of significance includes: Rush, *Death and Burial*, (1941) and Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, (1971) followed by Paxton, *Christianizing Death* (1990). More recently is Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, first published in French in 2003, and reprinted in English, translation by E. Trapnell Rawlings and J. Foutier-Pucci (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009) and Hope, *Roman Death* (2009). In all cases, the research is mainly descriptive, with very limited or only indirect attention to women’s involvement in ancient death ritual.

understanding about how and why particular rituals were transmitted and adapted in terms of Christianity.

In order to assess current scholarship on ancient funerary rites, I will use the stages of the Greco-Roman funeral developed by Toynbee as an organizational framework. These stages, which involve obsequies *pre-* and *post-mortem* are as follows: 1) preparation for death; 2) rituals immediately following death; 3) the lying-in-state or wake (Gk. *próthesis*); 4) the carrying-out (Gk. *ekphorá*) or funeral procession (Lat. *pompa*); 5) burial/disposal of the corpse, and 6) commemoration of the deceased.[152] Why use Toynbee's schema? There are two important reasons. First, most scholars in this area utilize Toynbee's framework, and second, Toynbee's framework also reflects the general understanding of death rituals as described by ritual studies scholars.[153] And third, for completely utilitarian purposes, the schema provides a structure for the examination of Greco-Roman funerary rites and the role of women in those rites as part of domestic religiosity.

Greco-Roman Funerary Rituals

152. Toynbee, *Death and Burial,* 43–55.

153. Toynbee's organizational framework (mentioned above) is very similar to the framework associated with ancient Greek funerals mentioned in Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 4-10: 1) the moment of dying; 2) preparation of the body for the wake; 3) the wake is held in the home; 4) formal lamentation; 5) the funeral procession; 6) the burial; 7) purification; 8) subsequent offerings at the tomb, and 9) the ritual funeral meal. A complex listing developed by Grimes includes: 1) anticipating death; 2) mourning; 3) protecting survivors from the dead; 4) publicizing or announcing a death; 5) congregating, comforting; 6) showing gratitude, respect, or sympathy; 7) demonstrating kinship or status, ensuring succession; 8) dramatizing death's finality; 9) maintaining and reconstructing social order after a death; 10) denying death's finality; 11) releasing, integrating, embracing death's finality, and 12) commemorating. Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 218–282. Remarkably, many of these can be clustered together into Toynbee's schema.

Peter Brown notes that funeral/burial customs throughout the ancient Mediterranean were "among the most notoriously stable aspects of most cultures."[154] This means that in terms of describing Roman funeral rituals there is a scholarly tradition of incorporating Greek practices both due to the stability noted by Brown and the *opinio communis* that the Romans adapted and adopted a substantial quantity of Greek culture.[155] Ancient Roman epitaphs, argues Beryl Rawson, demonstrate "the tenacity with which many people without ample means clung to the belief that it was a family's duty to come together to commemorate the death of one of its members."[156] These observations by Brown and Rawson support the central idea of this thesis that newly converted Christian families assumed and adapted previous Roman death rituals. Furthermore, if there existed "the overwhelming role of the family in the care of the dead,"[157] we might expect the existence of strong familial participation and solidarity (*communitas*)[158] as overriding

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154. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* 24.

155. In a letter from Cicero to Atticus, Cicero admits his "voluptuous pleasure" in collecting Greek art. *Letters to Atticus*, translated by E. O. Winstedt, vol.1 (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 1.9, 23. "Hellenism," that is, Greek language and Greek culture, permeated the Mediterranean region after Alexander the Great beginning in 332 B.C.E. Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395–600* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 182–185. On evidence of the flourishing of the Hellenistic styles of ash chests and sarcophagi in Etruria and the Italic peninsula from the fourth to second centuries B.C.E. see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 13. The Roman perspective on death changed under influence by Greek philosophy, Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 38. Roman tombs mimicked Hellenistic shrines. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 130. The fusion of Greek and Roman elements are evident in Roman 'tower-tombs.' Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 164. The formulaic carved funerary stelae of a pair or group of figures standing or seated, and used by Romans in their epitaphs, is of the Greek style. *Death and Burial*, 248–49. Tolerance, syncretism, and pluralism in the Greek (Hellenistic) system of beliefs were incorporated by Romans, Jews, and Christians in a process of "cultural-mixing." Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth*, 6–7.

156. Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, edited by Beryl Rawson (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm, 1986), 37.

157. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 24.

158. The term "*communitas*," solidarity (or what Victor Turner refers to as that "modality of social interrelatedness") is visible in rites of passage as portrayed by actor-participants "as a timeless condition, an eternal now … a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable … [when] myths are recited explaining the origin, attributes and behavior" of those in transition"; the visual and auditory symbols of

factors in the various stages of Roman funerary practices. These will become evident in the domestic religiosity pertaining to death in the sections to follow. Moreover, given the domestic context, the participation and leadership of women should also be an expectation.[159]

An additional consideration comes to mind. Because death and burial fall under the jurisdiction of domestic religiosity and although most of the evidence comes from texts and images associated with the élite, one can assume that the general framework of practices was present throughout other social classes with adaptations due to practical considerations such as economics. In other words, whereas the well-to-do may have used slaves or hired undertakers to prepare the body for burial and may have commemorated their ancestors in elaborate material culture and in texts, 'ordinary' people likely performed similar rituals themselves or received the help of kinsfolk in memorializing their memories, grief, and respect for the ancestors in less enduring forms and on a smaller scale.[160]

Preparation for Death

Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee in *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, explains that as one's death drew near, "relations and close friends gathered round the dying person's

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solidarity "operate culturally as mnemonics, or … as 'storage bins' of information … about cosmologies, values, and cultural axioms, whereby a society's 'deep knowledge' is transmitted from one generation to another." Victor Turner, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of *Communitas*," *Worship* 46.7 (Aug – Sep 1972): 394–99.

159. H. A. Shapiro, " The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," *AJA* 95.4 (Oct 1991): 629-56. Shapiro discusses vase depictions of women performing two of the "banned rituals, lacerating the flesh and singing of the thrênos"; these actions "are all set in the privacy of the home," so were presumably not impacted by the prohibitions of funerary conduct in public. Shapiro, "Iconography of Mourning," 631.

160. The 'legacy' of the lower classes in terms of commemoration will be found in the 'newest' of the material culture data types, papyri and graffiti. A future study will use these sources.

bed, to comfort and support him or her and to give vent to their own grief."[161] In *Roman Death,* Valerie Hope points out that the act of dying was typically idealized by Roman custom; any "pain, suffering or anger that the dying might have experienced" was rarely mentioned in the literature, and "especially men, were supposed to be calm and resigned" on their deathbeds.[162] Women and children were to show courage, be thoughtful to those around and to bravely speak "comforting and uplifting words" to the loved ones in attendance.[163] These behaviors might be considered societal ideals.

However, more realistically we might consider the deathbed scene in most Roman households as "busy places, with various people—family, friends and slaves—milling around."[164] Actual depictions of the death vigil are uncommon but Hope identifies a funerary relief from the second century C.E. on display in the British Museum (Appendix A, fig. 1a; see also a variation in fig. 1). The scene shows a girl "pictured as if sleeping … on a high couch, beneath which are a dog" and her slippers resting on a footstool; "Mourners flank the couch, and two seated figures, probably the girl's parents, rest their heads in their hands."[165] It was the moral and familial duty (*pietas*) in the Greco-Roman

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161. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 43. As we shall see shortly, actual lamentation should be delayed in the ritual process until the person dies; to begin too early was thought to bring bad luck for both the deceased and the bereaved. Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament of Greek Tradition*, 2nd edition, revised by D. Yatromanolakis and P. Roilos (Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4.

162. Hope, *Roman Death*, 50.

163. Hope, *Roman Death*, 51. Hope notes that the contemplative position of resting-the-head-in-the-hand, found in many images, is considered a gesture of sorrow/grief. *Roman Death*, 51. For the idealization of death, see the primary sources: Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, translated by Betty Radice. LCL 55, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 5.16; Statius, *Silvae*, edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. LCL 206 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.1.

164. Hope, *Roman Death*, 51.

165. The dying person is often depicted as peaceful or asleep. Hope, *Roman Death*, 52, 200n18.

world to care not only for a family member who was dying, but also for members already deceased, and ancestors of the deceased as well.[166] Such behavior preserved the collective identity of the *familia*.

Alfred C. Rush explains further that as death approached, the hands and feet of the dying person were straightened out according to "a popular and ancient belief that the soul left the body gradually, starting from the tips of the toes, working its way through the various members, and departing through the mouth."[167] In addition, it was customary to place *viaticum* (a coin) on the tongue of the dying individual; *viaticum* for the Romans meant "supper," "provisions," or "money for a journey" and often signified the fee paid to Charon the ferryman for the soul's journey across the River Styx into the after-life.[168]

Two other rituals, closely related to each other, were performed for the person just before death. One was catching the last breath and the second was imparting the last kiss. Since the breath was thought to carry the spirit or soul preparing to leave the body upon

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166. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 167.

167. Alfred C. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 91–92. Hope explains that for very well-to-do families, the tasks of straightening the limbs and the laying out of the body may have been performed by *pollinctores* who were the male slaves of the *Libitinarius*, the undertaker; other funeral specialists who worked for the *Libitinarius* included the *vespillones* who carried corpses and coffins, the *fossores*, the gravediggers, and the *ustores* who cremated the corpses—these specialists resided in a grove dedicated to *Libitina* the goddess of funerals "outside the Esquiline Gate of Rome where items and services for burials could be purchased or hired." *Roman Death*, 69. On the use of *pollinctores* by the upper classes, see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 45. On the custom of straightening the limbs of the dead, see Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, translated by A. Bowen and P. Garnsey, *Translated Texts for Historians* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool Press, 2003), 7, 12, 22.

168. Rush mentions the use of the coin as *viaticum* for the journey into the afterlife; this definition is also used in the writings of Lucian, Propertius, and Juvenal. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 93–94. See Lucian, *Charon*, edited by Austin Morris Harmon, vol. 2, LCL 54 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), 317–447, and Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and the Art of Poetry*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, LCL 194 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 17.54. On Roman *viaticum*, see Plautus, *Bacchides*, edited and translated by John Barsby (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 1.94.

death, the Greeks and Romans deemed it important to catch that final gasp in a kiss.[169] Servius explained that the final kiss pulled into the living the essence of the one dying and could even instill into that dying person some of the living's own spirit.[170]

Women and Preparation for Death

Women, due to their social relations, would be among the many gathered round the deathbed. Though there is no specific documentation about who organized the activity at this critical time, it is most likely a role assumed by the *mater* (the mother/wife) since she customarily directed the household activity. In addition, other family and friends would be drawn to the scene at the deathbed. The group would obviously include kinswomen, and of course, depending on the familial relations and situation, women would have a prominent presence in the case of the death of a husband or a child. In addition, because dying occurred in the home (in ideal circumstances), it may be assumed that kinswomen provided the basic human needs for the dying person (food, water, comfort, love and support). Of course, depending on the social class of the family, some of these tasks may have been assigned to slaves or hired undertakers. In the case of the untimely death in 9 C.E. of Drusus the Elder, brother of the future emperor Tiberius, Tacitus lamented that Drusus died far from home and did not have the good fortune of a final embrace and kiss from his mother or wife.[171] This suggests that the person who commonly performed the last kiss ritual was the mother or wife of the

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169. See Hope, Roman Death, 199–200n15 for a comprehensive listing of ancient literary sources that discuss the ritual of catching the last breath with a final kiss.

170. Servius, *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil*, edited by Georgius Thilo (Leipzig, 1883), 3.63. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 102.

171. Tacitus, *The Annals of Tacitus*, translated by A. J. Woodman, Book 3 in *Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries* 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.5 Hope, *Roman Death*, 65.

deceased. Seneca identified that person as "the nearest relative present" or the "*matri*" (mother).[172] Hope addresses "the sense of pollution, both physical and spiritual" that fell over the family, the household members, and the house itself upon the death of kin; this pollution especially affected those (women) performing the necessary preparations of the body for burial.[173] These ritual acts constituted *familial* worship, *sacra privata*, and it would appear that women (as the main agents of domestic religiosity) negotiated contact with death, on behalf of the *familia* and as part of the duty every Roman *familia* had in terms of protecting the rest of the community and especially pontiffs from contamination.[174] Therefore, in cases where the *familia* could not afford the services of *pollinctores*, who was there to straighten the limbs of the dying person or lift him/her to the floor? Who better to perform the more intimate rituals of reassurance, holding the hand, or stroking the brow than the closest relative—the mother, wife, sister, or perhaps a female nurse-slave? Who better to place the all-important *viaticum* (food, drink, coin) in the mouth of the one dying upon his/her last breath than his/her own mother or spouse?

Rituals Immediately Following Death

Among Latin writers, Pliny the Elder, Virgil, and Ovid mentioned that once the person died, the same relative who caught the final breath in a kiss also closed the eyes and mouth of the deceased.[175] Again, Roman depictions of these moments are rare, but a

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172. Seneca, *De Consolatione*, 3.2.

173. Hope, *Roman Death*, 70–71.

174. Hope, *Roman Death*, 71–72.

175. Virgil, *Aeneid 9*, 486–87. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, edited and translated by W. H. S. Jones, vol.7, LCL 393 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 150. Ovid, *Tristia. Ex Ponto*, edited by G. P. Goold and translated by A. L. Wheeler, LCL 151, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 3.3.43–44. See also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 106 and Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 44.

Greek funerary plaque (Appendix A, fig. 2) serves nicely to illustrate the scene. Portrayed on the plaque is the corpse lying on the funeral couch. At the front of the couch is a woman who has likely just finished the obsequies in question because "the eyes of the dead are closed and his mouth is kept shut by a chin band which was used for this purpose."[176] The moment of death signals the close relatives to begin calling repeatedly the name of the dead (*conclamatio*) and lamenting him/her; it is a process that will continue until the body is cremated or interred.[177] John Heller suggests that the *conclamatio* was intended to awaken the deceased "back into life" and so prevent the possibility of burying or cremating someone still alive.[178] Once the eyes and mouth are closed, the body is lifted off the bed to the ground (*depositio*) perhaps to indicate the person's return to the earth.[179]

Next the corpse was bathed in warm water in preparation for the laying-out (the wake); this was followed by the application of oils, wine, salt, honey, cedar resin, balsam, and/or myrrh (amounts and combinations of course, contingent upon the status of the *familia*).[180] The body was usually clothed in "the garments of daily life" (white toga for deceased males, or "precious garments" for wealthy Romans).[181] Hope mentions that

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176. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 106.

177. Cremation or inhumation usually took place within three days, though this varied depending on the status of the deceased's *familia*. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 44.

178. John Heller, "Burial Customs of the Romans," *The Classical Weekly* 25.24 (May 1932): 194.

179. Some among the Romans saw the departed as joining the earth goddess, *Terra Mater*; hence the imagery in much of the literature and art of "bones or ashes giving birth to flowers." Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 37.

180. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 112, 118.

181. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 127.

powder (pollen) was “applied to the face of the deceased to conceal the discoloration of death” and for aristocrats, a death mask could be made to use for future portraits of the deceased.[182] A funeral crown or wreath (floral garland), a token of honor, was set upon the head or breast of the departed.[183] If a coin had yet to be placed in the mouth of the departed to pay Charon, that ritual was the final preparation before the wake.

Meanwhile, the entire household was considered *familia funesta*, “obliged to undertake the funeral and also prohibited from usual activities” precisely because of the pollution embodied in the death; in other words, everyone in the family, whether or not he/she handled the corpse, was polluted.[184]

Women and Rituals Immediately Following Death

As indicated above, certain writers identified the nearest relative (mother/wife) as the one who would ideally catch the last breath in a final kiss and then close the eyes and mouth of the deceased; this was affirmed in the Greek plaque we examined. Kinswomen were expected to begin lamentation at the moment of the death and not before, because, as Margaret Alexiou explains, “to weep for someone who was still alive … was a bad omen.”[185] Ann Suter states explicitly that lament was a “female-gendered activity and … men were not supposed to lament, either in literature or in real life”; however, “a lamenting woman was a powerful figure” whose emotionality was “a potential threat to

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182. For the upper classes, death masks may have been made prior to a person’s death because “surviving examples of ‘death masks’ have been found interred with the remains of the deceased.” Hope, *Roman Death*, 71.

183. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 134–36.

184. Hope, *Roman Death*, 71.

185. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 4.

the orderly functioning" of the civic sphere and the ancients believed it undermined "the heroic male code of military glory."[186] Private lament (*sacra privata*) performed by individuals at this stage of the funeral consisted of "spontaneous wailing" and "improvised grief"; it was termed *góos* by the Greeks.[187] Since only women were to lament, we may assume women performed both the *conclamatio* and the *góos*.

While it is not clear who completed the *depositio* (Lat. placing on the floor), we know contact with the corpse was cause for pollution. Hope explains "the direct handling of the corpse" was done mainly by women and paid undertakers, making men the least affected by pollution.[188] Consequently, *depositio* may have been among the duties of kinswomen. Literary sources confirm women washed and anointed the deceased.[189] Additionally, women usually dressed and crowned the corpse[190] and may have powdered its face (with pollen) if *pollinctores* had not been hired for that task.[191]

The Laying Out or Wake (The Próthesis)

The funerary relief of the Haterii family from first century C.E. was discovered in 1847 on the *Via Labicana* near Rome and is now on display in the Vatican/Lateran

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186. Ann Suter, "Introduction," in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, edited by Ann Suter (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

187. Alexiou, *Ritual lament*, 13.

188. Hope, *Roman Death*, 71–72.

189. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 5; Heller, "Burial Customs," 194; Rush, *Death and Burial*, 112, 114.

190. Hope, *Roman Death*, 71. For more wealthy Romans, slaves may have performed these tasks.

191. There is a creative tension in most rites of passage between the social or centralized religious practices and the individual or familial need for expression and participation. According to Grimes this is particularly evident in funeral rites; therefore, specific practices may have been routinely performed by certain family members to satisfy the need for dutiful or expected participation. Still, there is always the potential for individual expression. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 218-282.

Museum (Appendix A, fig. 3).[192] It depicts the wake (Gk. *próthesis*). The relief illustrates a deceased female (likely a noble woman/*matrona*) on a high funeral couch/bier (Lat. *lectus funebris*) presumably on display in the *atrium* of the *domus* as was the custom; a crown can be seen on her head and to the right a man (possibly a relative or a professional *pollinctor*) approaches with a garland.[193] Those caring for the deceased would have ensured her feet were pointed toward the house-door before the visitation by relatives and friends began.[194]

If there was a fire in the hearth it was extinguished at the moment of death.[195] This signaled the start of formal lamentation.[196] Using the Greek funerary plaque again as an example (Appendix A, fig. 2), we see the "chief mourner" clasping the head of the corpse with both hands while the other mourners stretch their right hands over the deceased in an

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192. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 136.

193. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 137.

194. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 44–46. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 150. Further, Pliny the Elder suggests the custom of feet-toward-the-door derived from nature: one enters the world (is born) head first, so one should leave the world in the opposite way, feet first. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, 8.46.

195. Heller, "Burial Customs," 194.

196. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 108. Alexiou explains the different genres of lament include: musical, poetic, rhetorical, the *thrênoi*, *góos*, *kommós*, and the dirge (Lat. *nenia*). *Ritual Lament*, 108. The *thrênos, góos,* and *kommós* were "based on a ritual act or cry of lamentation, performed by the women often to a musical accompaniment." *Ritual Lament*, 108. The musical *thrênos* (lyric poetry) was sung antiphonally by the professional mourners and the kinswomen. *Ritual Lament*, 12. The *góos* was the most common form of lament in Homer—it was an improvisation "inspired by the grief of the occasion" and was "sung by the dead man's relations or close friends" or as an individualized narrative lament that was simply spoken. *Ritual Lament*, 13, 103. On the other hand, the *kommós* was a specified type of "tragic lament in dramatic tragedy." *Ritual Lament*, 103. In contrast, an epigram was the spoken oration or rhetoric; it could take the form of the *élegos*, *epitáphios lógos*, and *epikédeion.* These grew out of the social and literary activity of the men, developing the elements of commemoration and praise, which had been present in the archaic *thrênos"* of the women. *Ritual Lament*, 108. For more about the *dirge/nenia* as a 'funeral chant' contrasted with the *laudatio* as the funeral speech/eulogy, see Dorota Dutsch, "*Nenia*: Gender, Genre, and Lament in Ancient Rome," in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, edited by Ann Suter (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 258–72.

effort to touch him/her.[197] Other common gestures of grief involved raising both hands above the head, sometimes beating one's head, scratching one's cheeks, and pulling at the hair; all of these gestures were part of ritual lamentation comprising "movement as well as wailing and singing."[198] In fact, each precise "movement was determined by a pattern of ritual, frequently accompanied by the …*aulós* [Gk. double reed pipe]" making the scene resemble "a dance, sometimes slow and solemn, sometimes wild and ecstatic."[199]

Funerary art depicting the ancient wake is minimal. However, the Haterii relief (Appendix A, fig. 3) offers one illustration. The deceased is draped with a coverlet (often beautifully woven and decorated) and a pillow/cushion is positioned under the head; also, candles, lamps, incense-burners, and vegetation of various types surround the funerary couch.[200] To warn passers-by that there had been a death in the household (and therefore pollution), "a branch of cypress or spruce, always a symbol of death, was broken off, and [as shown in the art] was placed before the door of the house."[201] Also near the door of the *domus* was a "bowl of water brought from outside [likely from another household,

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197. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6. See also François Lissarrague who refers to an archaic funerary *pinax*, or terra-cotta plaque housed in the Louvre (ca. 500 B.C.E.), which depicts the chief mourner (identified as the mother). "Figures of Women," in *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, edited by Pauline Schmitt Pantel, translated by A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 166–67.

198. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6.

199. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6.

200. Heller, "Burial Customs," 194.

201. Heller, "Burial Customs," 194. Toynbee also mentions the placement of a great acanthus leaf at the front door of the house of death to warn anyone passing by of death-pollution. *Death and Burial*, 45.

and therefore unpolluted] for the purification of all who came into contact with the corpse."[202]

Women and the Wake (Próthesis)

If women were preparing the corpse, they ensured the correct placement of the feet toward the door of the house. If a fire burned in the hearth, someone in attendance (perhaps a kinswoman) extinguished it; then, according to Virgil, female kin applied the ashes over their clothing and smeared their faces in a symbol of grief.[203] As mentioned above, the Attic funerary plaque (Appendix A, fig. 2) depicts the "chief mourner" holding the head of the deceased as a woman, probably the mother or wife.[204] But other women were involved as well. In a re -examination of the Haterii relief (Appendix A, fig. 3) we can locate two *praeficae* (hired female mourners) "with disheveled hair and hands raised to beat their breasts."[205] Another woman playing a double pipe (*aulós*) is seated at the foot of the couch and "a veiled woman stands beside her with hands raised and folded together" in a gesture of grief.[206] In front of the *lectus funebris* (Lat. funeral couch) are

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202. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 5.

203. Virgil, *Aeneid 10*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough and revised by G. P. Goold, LCL 64 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 463. Also Virgil, *Aeneid 12*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough and revised by G. P. Goold, LCL 64 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 465.

204. See Alexiou's reference to another Greek funerary plaque, Louvre 905, Brussels Inv. A3369. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6. The role of the 'chief mourner' obviously shifts given the identity of the deceased—the wife, mother, or daughter may become the 'chief mourner'; or in the case of a deceased wife, the husband may function as the 'chief mourner.' See also an image of a large *loutophoros* (water jar) dated ca. 490 B.C.E. (held in the Louvre, Paris) on which is painted a woman holding the head of the deceased. Lissarrague, "Figures of Women," 165–66. Lissarrague also discusses a particularly interesting terra-cotta plaque (*pinax*, ca. 500 B.C.E., Louvre, Paris) depicting a laying-in-state scene with seven women surrounding the funeral couch of a dead man; the figure touching the man's head is identified in an inscription above the figure as *mater* or mother. ""Figures of Women," 167, fig.14.

205. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 45. The Haterii relief is Roman and dated first century C.E.

206. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 45.

"four figures walking slowly towards the right: two are men and two are women, one of whom has let down her hair behind so as to hang loose about her back and shoulders. All four beat their breasts," again in a gesture of grief.[207] Near the head of the bier are three female figures (all with disheveled hair), seated at different levels, each holding one knee "in an attitude of grief" and thereby indicating they were engaged in the *conclamatio* (calling the name of the deceased).[208] This scene confirms a significant presence of women and the involvement of women in a variety of ritual activities.

Rush explains that the wake "was the occasion for the most violent manifestation of mourning" at Greco-Roman funerals.[209] For instance, Herodotus, in referring to the duration of the wake, declared that grieving women were known to smear themselves with dirt and mud, leave the house, wander the streets with their bosoms bare, striking themselves as they went; then they would solicit their female relatives to join them and behave likewise.[210] Women's grief also involved "rolling on the ground, tearing the hair, plucking the cheeks, [and] tearing the clothing"; furthermore, the "tearing of hair was linked … with the drawing of blood, and was regarded as the first offering or sacrifice to the dead."[211] These many gestures of sorrow were customary ritual actions of women involved in lamentation.

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207. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 45.

208. Toynbee, *Death and Ritual*, 45. The *conclamatio* was typically indicated in funerary art by the gesture of hands on the knees. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 168.

209. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 163.

210. Herodotus, *Historiae 2*, translated George Campbell Macaulay, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1890, repr. in eBook, 2009), 85, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1449070&pageno=57, (accessed July 29, 2011). Also Homer, *Iliad*, 18.26–27; 18.28–31; 19.283–86.

211. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 163. Homer, *Iliad*, 23.135–36, 141. Tertullian railed against blood sacrifice at funerals, especially the Roman gladiatorial games held in conjunction with imperial funerals.

In the final preparations of the body, kinswomen (or slaves under their direction) draped the body with a coverlet and crowned it with a wreath/garland. And conceivably female relatives crafted the coverlets, wreaths, and garlands themselves.[212]

Still, there are numerous details we know nothing about. For instance, who arranged and lit the candles, lamps, and incense-burners? Who chose the vegetation to scatter about the funerary couch and the branches to hang on the door of the *domus* to mark the house for death? Can we surmise that the *mater* of the household directed/managed these domestic *sacra*, too?[213]

The Funeral Procession (Ekphorá or Pompa)

The duration of the *próthesis* (Gk.) varied, but it was common for the deceased to be carried out of the *domus* by the third day to begin the procession to the gravesite.[214] Prior to the fourth century in Rome, the funeral procession (Lat. *pompa funebris*; Gk. *ekphorá*) may take place in the daytime except for the poor, slaves, and children, for whom funerary processions were to be held at night.[215] However, in 356 C.E. the emperor Julian (Julian the Apostate) decreed that funerals would occur "before day-break, that is,

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Tertullian, *De Spectaculis,* edited with an English translation by T. R. Glover, LCL 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 263,265.

212. Women are depicted weaving and preparing fabric in Lissarrague, "Figures of Women," 209.

213. Not only were the living to avoid direct contact with a corpse (touching/handling) but also the sight or even physical proximity of a corpse caused pollution; it was the obligation of the *familia funesta* therefore, to prevent others from also becoming polluted—presumably women of the *familia* would have played a large part in carrying out this obligation. Lindsay, "Death Pollution," 155.

214. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6.

215. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195.

at night."[216] The mourners—kinsfolk, friends, neighbors, and guests—assembled outside the house of the departed. In the case of aristocrats, mourners were marshaled by *lictors* carrying the insignia of the *familia*.[217] As the procession assembled and for its duration, formal lamentation (Gk. *thrênos*, Lat. *nenia*) was sung and led by hired female mourners (*praeficae*) and responded to antiphonally by the attending kinsfolk and friends dressed in black/dark clothing (*lugubria*).[218] The deceased was carried from the house on a bier upon the shoulders of pallbearers or in some cases placed in a wagon pulled by a mule.

It was customary for the *pompa funebris* to proceed toward the tomb in specific order as illustrated in a first century B.C.E. marble funerary relief from Amiternum, near Aquila, Italy (Appendix A, fig. 4). This particular relief is significant because it belonged, not to an upper class family, but to a freeborn Roman *familia*.[219] Lisa A. Hughes argues that a "socially ambitious" middle-class family, the Apisii, commissioned the Amiternum relief at considerable expense; Hughes identifies the deceased represented in the relief as Publius Apisius, a centurion, likely a retired veteran of "elevated wealth and status."[220] As

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216. Rebillard explains that the edict in 356 C.E. by Julian Caesar (Julian the Apostate) "bearing the names of Constantius and of Julian" (later preserved in the *Theodosian Code*, 9.17.5) bans diurnal (daytime) funerals, penalizes tomb violations, and "evokes the ideas of impurity and pollution connected with cadavers." Rebillard also argues that during the earliest Roman times, all burials (and processions) were restricted to nighttime, so the suggestion is that Julian was restoring those early customs rather than targeting Christians with the law. *Care of the Dead*, 64–65. However, Lindsay disagrees and maintains instead that, "it seems unlikely that the original funeral ceremony was ever held at night." "Death Pollution," 155. Hope argues that the presence of torches was common in funeral processions indicating that perhaps "all funerals were originally held at night, but equally their use may have had symbolic or protective use, lighting the way of the deceased to the next world or warding off evil spirits." *Roman Death*, 79. Obviously, there is disagreement in the scholarship.

217. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195.

218. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 46.

219. Lisa A. Hughes, "Centurions at *Amiternum*: Notes on the Apisius Family," *Phoenix* 59.1/2 (Spr 2005): 82.

220. Hughes, "Centurions," 77–87.

mentioned earlier, obligations (*munera*) required Romans to provide funerals for family members with, as Heller puts it, "as much pomp as possible" despite the expense.[221] However, regardless of factors such as *munera*, or the possibility of "mass-produced formulaic" art, and the "social function" of the Amiternum relief,[222] certain features in the depiction of the funeral procession are useful for this analysis.

Leading the *pompa* are the musicians (pipers, trumpeters, horn-blowers)[223]; they are followed by the hired *praeficae* engaged in lamentation. In upper class or imperial processions dancers and mimes wear the *imagines* (masks of the family's ancestors)[224] and bearers carry "objects representing the deeds of the deceased," perhaps trophies, special tablets with inscriptions, civic crowns, or tools of his/her trade.[225] Next is the bier "borne by sons of the deceased" or male kin, friends, and freed slaves.[226] At the end of the cortège are the mourners likely dressed in "the universal dark clothing" though no paint is preserved on the relief to verify this.[227] A male figure carrying an incense-burner is shown

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221. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195.

222. Yasin, "Funerary Monuments," 444.

223. See Horace, *Satires*, 6.42–44.

224. For a comprehensive discussion of the use of *imagines* by mimes in the *pompa*, see Geoffrey S. Sumi, "Impersonating the Dead: Mimes at Roman Funerals," *American Journal of Philology* 123 (2002): 559–85. Also Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 47–48.

225. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195.

226. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195.

227. See similar discussion in Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 46–47.

in the bottom left hand corner and, while not apparent in this relief, torchbearers would be interspersed among the crowd to light the way to the gravesite day or night.[228]

Women and the Funeral Procession (Ekphorá or Pompa)

From the foregoing analysis of the *pompa*, we surmise that professional female *praeficae* led the singing of the *nenia* while the kinswomen, dressed in black, responded antiphonally. However, more is revealed about the behavior of women in the Amiternum relief (Appendix A, fig.4).[229] In the top left hand corner all eight of the mourners are women. The musicians are male, though a female *aulós* player was depicted in the Haterii wake scene.[230] Other sources (Athenaeus, Horace) indicate that women played the flute, harp, and lyre at Roman banquets, at the temple, and in the theatre and even formed guilds.[231] Perhaps the public nature of the *pompa* restricted the participation of women musicians.

Since ca. 450 B.C.E. the Roman laws of the *Twelve Tables* had legislated funeral behavior (at least officially) in an effort to curb extravagance.[232] Still, in the first century

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228. Heller, "Burial Customs," 195. In *Saturae* Persius recounts that musicians led the funerary procession, followed by torchbearers, and then the corpse upon a bier. Persius, *Saturae*, edited by W. V. Clause, vol. 3 of the 2nd rev. ed, of *Oxford Classical Texts* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), 103–106.

229. The Amiternum funerary relief, ca. first half of the first century B.C.E., is housed in the museum in Aquila, Italy. Hughes, "Centurions," 79. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 47.

230. One reason may be that the wake occurred in the private space of the *domus* while the *pompa* took place in public where women were more restricted.

231. For an account of female temple musicians, possibly slaves, see Alfred Sendrey, *Music in the Social and Religious Life of Antiquity* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974), 32. Athenaeus refers to "single-pipe girls," "flute girls," and "harp girls" who entertained at banquets. *The Deipnosophists* (Banquet of the learned), translated by C. D. Yonge, vol. 2, (London: Bohn, 1854), 13. 592–93. Also Horace mentions that female single-pipe players formed guilds. *Satires*, 469.

232. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 118, 136, 230. Rush explains that torches and candles were symbolic of Roman funerals (whether held in the day or night); they were used to light the funeral pyre for cremation and were "lights" for the spirits of the dead. *Death and Burial*, 223.

B.C.E. Cicero reiterated the law limiting a *pompa funebris* to “ten flute players” and forbidding mourning women from singing “the funeral dirge” or scraping “their cheeks as a manifestation of sorrow.”[233] Bloodied cheeks and arms were among the gestures (*planctus*) performed mainly by women in funerary lamentation and these gestures accompanied formalized lament poetry (*nenia*) sung antiphonally to music. [234] Furthermore, *nenia* and *planctus* (music and gesture) were combined with other sensory mnemonics including sights (colorful costumes and masks, the flames from torches and lamps), movements (gesturing, dancing and mime), fragrances (perfumes, spices, and incense), and sounds (the cacophony of shrill pipes and wailing women) all working together to compose the full performance of ritual lamentation.[235]

This multi-sensory behavior of lamenting women was sometimes thought to carry “superstitious,” “apotropaic,” or magical intent.[236] Rush suggests that Greco-Roman

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233. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 176. See also Cicero, *De Legibus*, edited and translated by Clinton Walker Keyes, LCL 213 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 451–52.

234. Dutsch comments that while both men and women took part in the procession to the gravesite and both expressed their grief, “only the female relatives were expected to engage in moaning and self-mutilation,” and only the hired mourners (*praeficae*) performed the singing/chanting of the *nenia* to the accompaniment of a flute (or a stringed instrument). Dutsch notes further that the *praeficae* performed the prescribed mourning and gestures (scratching their cheeks and crying their tears) but the kin felt the real pain and grief; essentially, the role of the *praeficae* and their *nenia* therefore, was to lead/lure the spirit of the deceased safely to the underworld. Dutsch, “*Nenia,*” 260-63. Victor Turner explains that ritual celebrations like funerals typically involve the senses, symbols, and messages concerning “the key values and virtues of the society that produces it.” Turner uses the term “meta-experience” for the multi-sensory behaviors involved in a celebration. Victor Turner, “Introduction,” in *Celebrations: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, edited by V. Turner (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 14-15, 19.

235. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6.

236. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 168. Ovid describes certain behaviors at the feast of the dead (*Lemuria*)—throwing black beans and banging copper pots—intended to scare away the ghosts of the ancestors returning to the *domus*. Ovid, *Fasti*, translated by James G. Frazer and revised by G. P. Goold, vol. 5, LCL 253 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 441-42. According to Apuleius, during wakes the lamenters should not take their gaze from the one who is deceased lest “dangers” overtake his/her spirit. *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)*, edited and translated by J. Arthur Hansen, vol. 2, LCL 453 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21. Orestes inferred that “the bridge between the upper world of light and the darkness of the underworld [was] not to be found in words or deeds but in the

lament served several purposes: 1) to scare away the evil spirits or so-called 'dangers' that hovered near the deceased; 2) to keep the dead separated from the living, and 3) to lull the spirit of the deceased into compliance so as to be easily "led where the relatives wanted to lead it, namely, to the tomb so that it would be confined there."[237] In other words, for the ancients, lament, and music especially, "exercised a necromantic influence on the spirits of the dead."[238] Obviously, these qualities were sometimes associated with the women who performed the rituals using music and lament.

Regarding the activities of women during the procession to the gravesite, many details are still unknown. For instance, were the dancers, mimes, and bearers of citations only men? Who carried the torches, fragrances, vegetation, and grave offerings?

Burial/Disposal of the Body

Roman law decreed that disposal of corpses was to occur outside the city boundaries (*pomerium*) mainly for reasons of sanitation and ritual pollution.[239] For the majority of Romans the burial site/tomb was owned and managed by the householder (or a patron) "for him/herself and the members of the *familia*, which included blood family,

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singular power of the sung lament accompanied, as it always [was], by ritual beatings of the breast, tears and other outward displays of grief." Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 146. Plato cited a "struggle' between the soul and the body as the soul attempts to break loose at death; therefore, death was considered a time of "danger" when the "*daimon* appointed to look after each man during his lifetime endeavored to lead away his soul." Plato, "Phaedo," in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler, vol.1, LCL 36 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 107d, 373. For dangers at the time of death see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 5.

237. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 169.

238. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 169.

239. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 48.

freedmen/women, slaves, and others attached to the household."[240] Tomb inscriptions frequently indicated "legal sanction and fines" for the burying of anyone in or around the tomb not specified by the owner; in other words, the householder or the patron controlled who could be buried at the gravesite on the land they owned.[241]

Regardless of the type of disposal chosen by the family, some form of interment/inhumation (*humatus*) was essential to make the site a "legal grave"—hence, sacred and protected.[242] Cicero stated the necessity of cutting off 'a member' of the body (*os resectum*) and burying it in the earth prior to cremation.[243] According to Cicero, "this custom [earth burial] is confirmed by the rules of the pontiffs. For until turf is cast upon the bone, the place where a body is cremated does not have a sacred charter; but after turf is cast (the burial is considered accomplished and the spot is called a grave); then and not before, it has the protection of many laws of sanctity."[244] Horace mentioned that throwing three handfuls of earth upon the corpse was enough to legalize the burial and release the family from their "legal defilement."[245]

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, an additional "blood sacrifice" was performed at the burial site as an offering to the spirit of the deceased—*Solon's Laws* refer to the

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240. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 247.

241. John Bodel, "From *Columbaria* to Catacombs," in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context,* edited by L. Brink and D. Green (New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 187.

242. Hope, *Roman Death*, 81.

243. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 442.

244. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 426-27. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 241–42.

245. Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, edited and translated by Niall Rudd, LCL 33 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 77. Also Varro, *De Lingua Latina, Books 5–7*, translated by G. Kent, LCL 333 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 5.23.

sacrifice of an ox while Cicero mentions a sow (*porca praesentanea*).[246] It is possible that the sacrificial meat became part of a small funerary meal (Gk. *perideipnon*) shared between the living and the dead (the portion for the deceased to be consumed by his/her spirit on the funeral pyre).[247] Rush explains that the practice of "blood sacrifice" eventually declined and was replaced by symbolic sacrifice—the cutting of hair as an offering to the dead, the laceration of face or arms to draw blood, or the draping of the corpse in a garment the color of blood red.[248]

Also part of the burial rites were invocations to the spirit of the deceased; Virgil refers to this custom as the "*vale*" meaning a bidding of farewell or "departing ceremony" accomplished by calling out the name of the deceased three times.[249] Presumably the *vale* was similar to the *conclamatio* which mourners repeated until the body was buried or cremated. The *vale* may also have been related to the *anáklesis* of ancient Greece that Alexiou refers to as "the supplication at the tomb" or invoking "the dead to rise again."[250]

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246. Hope, *Roman Death*, 85. Also see Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.22, 55. This sacrifice in Greco-Roman literature involved bulls, sheep, goats, swine, horses, dogs, and sometimes humans (for example, in Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles sacrifices twelve young men from Troy). Rush, *Death and Burial*, 212.

247. This meal was called the *silicernium*, which was said to "purge the family of their grief." Hope, *Roman Death*, 85-86. For suggestion that the family first returned home after the disposal of the corpse, prepared the meal provisions, and then returned to the gravesite the same day to hold the feast, see Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 152.

248. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 212-214. Cicero repeats Tablet 10.3 of the *Twelve Tables* forbidding women from scraping their cheeks, and referring to the unfortunate distress enacted by women in lament when they tear their cheeks and beat their heads, breasts, and thighs. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.23.59, Cicero elaborates further in *Tusculan Disputations*, translated by J. E. King, LCL 141 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 299.

249. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 254. See Virgil, *Aeneid 6*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough and revised by G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916) 231, 505–506. Rush suggests that Servius' *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid 1* provides more about the *Manes* (spirits of the dead); they were called forth at the completion of the burial by those at the funeral crying, "Vale, Vale, Vale." Rush, *Death and Burial*, 254.

250. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 109.

Also spoken at the gravesite (at least at aristocratic funerals) was the customary *laudatio funebris* (funeral oration) delivered in the fashion described by Polybius.[251] The oration, intended to praise the virtues and accomplishments of the deceased, was commonly performed by a son or male relative.[252] The *laudatio* was usually followed by the *nenia* (song of mourning) to the accompaniment of a flute.[253] Once the final words were spoken to the departed and the *nenia* sung, all that remained was the disposal of the body either by cremation or inhumation.

Archaeological evidence indicates that in numerous cases "grave gifts" accompanied the corpse onto the funeral pyre or into the grave, tomb, or sarcophagus.[254] Gifts included: perfumes, incense, cinnamon and cassia, pots, jewelry, coins, lamps, and sometimes clothing items and tools used during life by the deceased.[255] In the case of cremation, the family remained until the pyre burned down and the embers had cooled, and then collected the ashes and bone remnants to place in a funerary urn or ash chest.[256] In the second century when the emperor Hadrian promoted "the vogue for Greek culture," it seems the use of decorative Greek sarcophagi grew in popularity in Italy and

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251. Polybius, *Historiae*, edited by W.R. Paton and revised by F. W. Wallbank and Christian Habicht, vol.3, LCL 138 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 389, 391.

252. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 259–60. According to Rush, the *laudatio* originated as a Roman custom and was later adopted (rather quickly) by the teachers of oratory in Greece. *Death and Burial*, 261.

253. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 261.

254. The corpse was laid upon the funeral pyre for cremation or placed into the tomb or grave for inhumation. Hope, *Roman Death*, 82-83. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 239. In addition, Cicero's discussion of Tablet 10.1 of the *Twelve Tables* (ca. 450 B.C.E.) reveals that both methods of burial were used because the law specified that it was forbidden either to burn or bury a corpse within the city precincts. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 23.58.

255. Hope, *Roman Death*, 82–85.

256. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 50.

more families began to choose inhumation for burial.[257] The wealthy kept "tombs for themselves and their dependants on their own estates" but ordinary Romans were buried in graves of various types "along the roads beyond the city gates" while the corpses of some slaves and the very poor were often cast into grave-pits or garbage heaps called *puticuli* and left to rot.[258]

As land for burial around Rome became scarce and more expensive,[259] Roman families opted for alternatives to burial types and locations.[260] John Bodel explains that during the reign of Augustus a new form of "burial monument (the *columbarium*)" was invented for group burial managed by a new social organization, the *collegium*.[261] Yet membership in *collegia* did not replace the *familia* as the primary caretaker in funerary ritual; Brent Shaw argues that the *familia* actually strengthened its claim as the dominant "living and affective social unit" in Roman society from the first to seventh centuries

257. Walker, *Memorials*, 17. Arthur Darby Nock presents the various conjectures by scholars about the Romans' change in preference from cremation to inhumation. Nock, "Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire," *HTR* 25.4 (Oct 1932): 321–359.

258. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 49.

259. Bodel argues that the current "scholarly consensus" seems to be that during the period from Augustus to Constantine, "the suburbs of the city [Rome] must have accommodated between 10,500,000 and 14,000,000 burials," but the state of the evidence is meager. John Bodel, "From *Columbaria*," 178–79. The information suggests severe crowding in Rome's available space for burial and explains why it was necessary to tunnel beneath the city's gravesites to create *hypogaea* and catacombs.

260. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 47-48.

261. Bodel, "From *Columbaria*," 180. Bodel explains that *columbaria* are defined, by modern usage, as "the architectural structures … large or small tomb buildings, built above or below ground … and distinguishable from other monumental tombs mainly by their interior configuration, which is marked by plastered walls and pillars systematically lined, from floor to ceiling, with rows of niches accessible via wooden ladders or stairways and scaffolding." Bodel, "From *Columbaria*," 195-96. This architectural form lasted for about 150 years from Augustus till Hadrian. "From *Columbaria*," 196. Catacombs, on the other hand, refer to the tunnels linking *hypogaea* (underground rooms where families were buried) and underground cemeteries "found beside the Via Appia and elsewhere outside Rome already during the second century." "From *Columbaria*," 199–200. Sometimes scholars use the term *hypogaea* to distinguish between pagan and Christian burial (in catacombs) but this is inaccurate as the burials were in fact mixed, Jewish, pagan, and Christian during the first three centuries. "From *Columbaria*," 188, 200.

C.E.[262] This implies that domestic religiosity in matters of death continued in spite of changes in burial fashion.

Women and Burial/Disposal of the Body

Roman women are recorded among the owners, managers, and patrons of cemeteries, tombs, underground *hypogaea* and catacombs as burial places for themselves and their *familia* and often for members of *collegia.*[263]

We know women disregarded the prohibitions in the *Twelve Tables* against lacerating their faces as "blood sacrifice" to the deceased (or to the spirits of the ancestors) because the practice is reported as late as the fifth century.[264] This part of the ritual lamentation performance was gradually replaced with pouring wine or scattering roses and violets (the colors of blood—red and purple) over the grave.[265]

Presumably the *vale*, *conclamatio*, and/or the *anáklesis*, the ritual invocations to the deceased, were part of lamentation and therefore performed by women. The ancient term, *anáklesis* meaning "to invoke the dead to rise again" was a particular ritual—that of pleading to the spirit of the dead to return— and was known to be performed especially by women.[266] This invocation is illustrated in an ancient Greek epigram, which states:

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262. Brent D. Shaw, "Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Late Roman Empire," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 33.4 (1984): 466, 485. See also Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 41.

263. Ramsay MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 29.2 (1980)," 208–218. Also Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 246–252. Regarding women's participation in the system of euergetism in the Greco-Roman world, see Riet Van Bremen, "Women and Wealth," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (London: Routledge, 1993), 223–242.

264. John Chrysostom (early fifth century C.E.) complains of women "making furrows down their cheeks.' *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 62.4.

265. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 220.

266. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 109–10.

> Often at this girl's tomb has her mother Kleino
> In tears cried out for her dear short-loved child,
> Invoking the soul of Philainis to return, who, before wedlock,
> Passed across the pallid stream of Acheron.[267]

The *nenia* was required at the conclusion of the eulogy. We recall that women (*praeficae*) led the *nenia* while female relatives performed the refrains antiphonally. All female participants would have incorporated gestures/movements (*planctus*) with the singing. As already mentioned, the *nenia* was accompanied by a flute-player, who could have been female since we know from the section above that women were recognized as flautists at other Roman events. Regardless, the entire lament performance was a critical component of the funerary process. Anna Caraveli-Chaves sums up the contribution of women's lamentation in the following way:

> Laments bridge and mediate between vital realms of existence: life and death, the physical and the metaphysical, present and past, temporal and mythic time. The lamenter becomes the medium through whom the dead speaks to the living, the shaman who leads the living to the underworld and back, thus effecting a communal confrontation with death and, through it, a catharsis. In her capacity as a mediator between realms, the lamenter affects the entire community. Through skillful manipulation of age-old conventions in poetic language she transforms the fact of individual death into 'equipment' for *all* the living.[268]

Burial rites also involved bringing gifts and offerings to be buried or burned with the deceased. The list of these gifts (see above) reveals items that are largely "domestic" in nature. Since Osiek and MacDonald have made an undeniably strong case for women's

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267. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 109. According to the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 264, Acheron was tone of the five rivers in the underworld of the dead; it was the river of pain/woe.

268. Anna Caraveli-Chaves, "Bridge Between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event," *The Journal of American Folklore* 93.368 (Apr – Jun 1980): 144–45.

management of the household and their traditional responsibility for hospitality,[269] we may infer that the *mater* of the household either directed or was involved in the production and preparation of these items (Appendix A, fig. 5). Also, if the family held a graveside feast following the cremation/interment, the *mater* would have been responsible for hosting the meal and therefore would direct and/or attend to the meal preparation, serving, and general hospitality.[270]

Commemoration of the Dead

Immediately following the gravesite rituals, the house of the deceased and all family members underwent a series of purification rites (*suffitio*) in which the kinsfolk were sprinkled with water, the house was swept clean,[271] household objects were washed in “sea-water and hyssop,” and those who had cared for the dead bathed in “clean water” to remove their pollution through contact with the corpse.[272] In addition, the family *Lares* (shrine to the domestic gods and ancestors) was purified with a sacrifice of wethers (lamb/sheep).[273] After several days of rest and mourning, the family prepared for the *cena novendialis* festivities. This ninth-day-after-burial celebration included repetition of the *suffitio* followed by a sacrifice to the spirit of the deceased whereby libations of wine were poured upon the grave and a memorial meal was held at or near the gravesite to

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269. Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 12–15. We might even go farther to suggest that it was the older women of the household (those responsible for passing down tradition) who directed the hosting of meals and the preparation/production of ritual gifts for the deceased. *A Woman’s Place*, 91–92.

270. Tulloch, “Family Funerary Banquets,” 167–69.

271. Hope, *Roman Death*, 86.

272. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 10.

273. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 51.

mark the end of this period of mourning.[274] The Roman upper classes often complemented the ninth-day celebration with elaborate entertainment including gala all-night parties, theatre productions, and gladiatorial games (*ludi*).[275] The funerary banquet (Lat. *refrigeratio*) was repeated at thirty days, at one year, and then annually to promote contact between the living and the dead.[276] Mario Erasmo explains that the paradox of Roman attitudes toward death "blurred the boundary between life and death" because dying "did not prevent one from continuing to participate in Roman life."[277] Rather, the deceased was continually reintegrated into society in the numerous festivals in his/her honor and (in the case of élite Romans) in a constant "symbolic presence" as an *imago* (likeness) at the family shrine (*lararium*) in the *atrium* of the *domus*.[278] At the same time the ancestors in the underworld were believed to welcome the arrival of the newly deceased and to reintegrate his/her spirit into the generational family of the dead.[279] Thus, the living and the dead bonded as one collective identity—the Roman *familia* and the larger Roman state.

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274. Toynbee, *Death and Ritual*, 51. Note that "these rituals may have lifted the sense of pollution, but the extent to which nine days marked the end of the formal mourning period varied according to gender and the degree of relationship between the mourner and the deceased … there were laws that stipulated how long people should be mourned for and who should mourn. Mourning was supposed to be in proportion to the age and status of the deceased"; for instance, "according to Paulus, those in mourning were to dress plainly, with no purple or white clothes or jewelry, and they were to avoid dinner parties … people could opt to display their grief for the designated periods … public display [of mourning] was, in principle, limited." Hope, *Roman Death*, 86. 123–24. Paulus, *Opinions*, translated by Samuel P. Scott (Cincinnati: Central Trust, 1932), 1.21.13–14. Regarding Greek laws of mourning, see Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 209n54.

275. Heller, "Burial Customs," 197. Also Hope, *Roman Death*, 86.

276. Hope, *Roman Death*, 88–89.

277. Mario Erasmo, "Among the Dead in Ancient Rome," *Mortality* 6.1 (2001): 31.

278. Erasmo, "Among the Dead," 32–33. Also Sumi, "Impersonating the Dead," 559–60.

279. Hope, *Roman Death*, 185. Erasmo, "Among the Dead," 32–33.

To assist the "figurative interaction" between the living and the dead, Rome's civic government set aside certain additional feast days when all Romans held banquets to celebrate their ancestors.[280] The *Parentalia* was intended for private commemoration of deceased *familia* for seven days in February ending with the *Feralia* for citywide public celebration.[281] The *Lemuria* (May 9, 11 and 13) was a private celebration to rid the *domus* of "kinless and hungry ghosts."[282] The *Rosalia* was held in May or June when family members brought roses to the cemetery to scatter over the graves of departed kin.[283] Finally, following on the heels of *Parentalia* and *Lemuria* was the *Caristia*, "a time for families to assemble and take stock of past, present and future generations by giving thanks to the family gods, remembering the dead and celebrating the young."[284] At the banquets accompanying these festivals it was customary to set out a portion of food for the deceased since it was believed the spirits of the dead required regular sustenance in their underworld home.[285] According to Jon Davies, the festivals, while classified "official" were legally "private" and considered "the business of clubs [*collegia*] and

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280. Erasmo, "Among the Dead," 41.

281. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 63–64.

282. The *Lemuria* ritual was domestic; it took place at midnight and involved certain gestures, washings, throwing black beans, repeating invocations (nine times), and "clashing bronze" to chase off the ghosts perhaps roaming the *domus*. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 64. Also Ovid, *Fasti*, 419–93.

283. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 118.

284. Hope, *Roman Death,* 99–100. See extensive discussion of the *Parentalia* in Ovid, *Fasti,* 499.

285. Commonly the poor and the homeless scrounged in the cemeteries for food offerings after family banquets. Rome expected that citizens would maintain a responsibility for the well being of the ancestors in order to uphold the reputation (*genius*) of the family and, by extension, the welfare of the empire and its people. Hope, *Roman Death*, 86-87. Also Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth,* 144–45.

families"; the state advocated "the relative separation of ordinary funerals from the mainstream politico-religious concerns" of Greco-Roman culture.[286]

Grand memorial feasts were held so frequently, observes Robin M. Jensen, that among middle and upper classes, "cemeteries featured communal banqueting tables [*mensae*] … drinking cups, bowls"[287] and dishes; there were even wells for washing, ovens/braziers for cooking, and stone couches (*biclinia* or *triclinia*) for the guests in attendance.[288] The nocturnal feasts at the graves were social events, opportunities for the mingling of the sexes; food and wine were abundant, and music, dancing and "boisterous frivolity" took place—probably for this reason a long list of restrictions appeared in ancient Greece and Rome during the centuries leading up to the common era.[289]

As mentioned above, the dead were expected to partake in the feasting, too. This was accomplished by means of a curious feature typical of many of the graves throughout the Roman world. Holes or pipes from the surface to the interior of the sarcophagus, ash-

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286. Davies notes that the Romans believed the gods of the dead, *di manes* (DMS on tombstones), should be worshipped/celebrated at three festival times, *Parentalia*, *Feralia*, and *Lemuria* as well as on a person's anniversary of death; improper attendance to rituals was thought to anger these spirits, thereby making them threatening. *Death, Burial, and Rebirth*, 146–47. Also, according to Davies, Roman thanatology "was partly hopeful and largely fearful," fearful that human beings would fail to maintain the "competence" and order of the Roman state and city by failing to maintain Roman "decorum"; this "decorum" was the only way to maintain "good fortune," and avoid or at least stall disorder and chaos, which amounted to the "counter-culture of war, famine and plague, and of day-to-day misery, illness, death and violence which insistently erupted" into the routines of the proper Roman life. *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 138. The distinction between the politico-religious duties of state and family was discussed earlier in terms of Roman law regarding worship—*sacra publica* and *sacra privata*.

287. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 107.

288. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 136. Also Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 107, 118 and 120.

289. Legislation appeared in Athens, Keos, Delphi, and Gambreion. See discussion in Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 14–16. Also S. C. Humphreys, *The Family, Women, and Death: Comparative Studies* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 85–86. Further see Plutarch, *Solon*, 12.4.434.

chest, or cinerary urn, allowed for the feeding of the dead; libations and food could be poured down the pipes or tubes to reach the ashes and bones of the deceased below.[290]

Over and above the scheduled festival days, family members made frequent visits to the cemeteries and gravesites to bring grave-goods "partly to honor the dead, but mainly to serve them and help them to feel at home in the afterlife."[291] The spirits of the dead were thought to exist in a domestic-like setting under or near the grave so in order to make the spirits (*manes*) feel comfortable, not only were the tombs made to look like houses, but the gifts brought as offerings included personal possessions and items of basic comfort.[292] Archaeological evidence reveals military equipment, dice, toys, gaming-counters, jewelry, toilet boxes, terracotta bowls and perfume bottles left near graves or inside house tombs.[293] Other grave offerings included: 1) libations of oil or wine, honey and milk; 2) perfumes and "wide baskets and cloth bundles with various kinds of food"; 3) musical instruments, ribbons, garlands, and clothing, and 4) lighted torches and lamps left alight on the graves.[294]The only scenes of these visitations to the gravesite appear on ancient Greek vases (Appendix A, fig. 5a) but they tend to corroborate the literary records.[295]

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290. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 51–52.

291. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 53.

292. Toynbee, *Death and Ritual*, 51–53. Hope states, "Tombs could be regarded as the homes of the dead and made to appear as houses, with windows, doors, mosaic floors and painted wall décor." *Roman Death*, 101. For a detailed discussion of the construction of tombs as homes, see Wallace-Hadrill, "Housing the Dead," 39–77.

293. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 52.

294. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 7–9.

295. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 8.

Finally, Greco-Roman commemoration of the dead typically included a memorial grave marker. As Susan Walker notes, "Permanent memorials were crucial to [Roman and Greek] … hopes for immortality."[296] Furthermore, "what the Greeks [and Romans] hoped to achieve for the dead was perpetual remembrance by strangers as well as kin.[297] A proper memorial was essential to the Romans and they planned in advance for the expenses. The wealthy might indicate in their wills how much should be spent while the less-well-to-do might tell family members their wishes; the poor relied on membership in *collegia* to provide the social and financial aspects of burial and proper memorial.[298] Papyrus documentation provides evidence that aristocrats made legal contracts to ensure the upkeep of their tombs and surroundings (orchards, gardens, pools).[299]

Women and Commemoration of the Dead

Clearly, female involvement in post-burial activities can be inferred in numerous areas. First, the purification rites (*suffitio*)—the washing and sweeping in the home of the deceased following disposal of the body—occurred in the domestic realm and would have been directed by the *mater* as manager of the household. In addition, all kinswomen would have bathed to complete the purification rites. In other words, in order for the *familia* to uphold its obligations to protect the public from contamination by death-pollution, women were duty-bound to ensure proper performance of the family's *sacra* regarding death; this positioned women as major agents of domestic religiosity in

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296. Walker, *Memorials,* 13.

297. Walker, *Memorials*, 270.

298. Hope, *Roman Death*, 66–68.

299. See Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 96–100 for examples of inscriptions and papyrus documentation specifying the maintenance of funerary gardens. Erasmo, "Among the Dead," 40

funerary matters. Further, since household mourning continued for nine days after the death (*cena novendialis*) the implication is that female lamentation continued as well. As argued above, this study assumes that women hosted funerary banquets. Therefore, following the same argument, it may be deduced that the *mater* directed the implementation of the ninth-day *refrigerium* (the banquet for the deceased shared with the bereaved). Wealthy families may have utilized slaves for the essential work of the banquet but the *mater* undoubtedly supervised their efforts.

Further, women would certainly have taken part in the domestic festivities of the *Parentalia*, the *Lemuria*, *Caristia*, and the *Rosalia*. The architectural modifications for cooking and dining at tombs imply the domestic context of gravesite festivities and therefore the likelihood of women's involvement in the hosting of graveside meals and the feeding of the dead via the libation tubes and pipes. Women participated with men in the nocturnal celebrations held at gravesites on feast days when families had opportunity to meet people outside the kinship grouping.[300]

As for the obligation of family visitation to the cemetery, women are identified as frequent participants. This is demonstrated by the many civic laws attempting to restrict funerary activities in the Greco-Roman world. *Solon's Laws* in Athens, the *Twelve Tables* in Rome, and Cicero's first century B.C.E. renewal of the law, seem to single out women in their legislation. Alexiou sums up the many citations this way:

> No woman was to go out with—or probably carry to the grave for burial with the dead—more than three garments, one *obol's* worth of food and drink, or a basket of more than one cubit's length. There was to be no procession by night except by lighted coach; also, no laceration of the flesh by mourners, no singing of set dirges and no wailing for other dead … the

300. Humphreys, *Family, Women, and Death*, 85–86.

> wake was to take place indoors and be over by sunrise … the only women permitted to follow the body and possibly weep at the graveside were those 'within the degree of (first) cousins' children', and those who were over sixty years old; and even they were to keep behind the men … all offenders were to be punished by *gynaikonómoi*, officials specially appointed to deal with women's affairs [in Athens].[301]

However, whether women complied with the law is quite another matter. We must presume they mostly ignored the sanctions because similar legislation appeared again and again well into late antiquity.

Finally, we know that women were patrons of burial societies (certain *collegia* provided funerals for dead members and their families), funerary monuments, cemeteries, and shrines because titles such as, *patrona, matrona,* and *mater* are used on inscriptions to indicate patron-status.[302] For example (in translation), "Sergia Paulina hosted a burial society in her house in Rome … Memmia Victoria, freeborn woman of third-century Italy, whose son was a … cavalry officer, was named 'mother' of an artisan group … while Claudia, wife of a freedman from Faleri Piceni, Italy, was hailed as 'mother' of a fullers' brotherhood."[303] In addition, legal records acclaim the patronage of a certain

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301. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 15. Alexiou provides possible reasons for the ancient legislation: 1) "curbing of extravagance indicates that the laws were aimed primarily at the rich"; 2) restricting "the right to mourn to the immediate kin suggests a changing emphasis from clan … to family"; 3) "the restrictions on women point to their former prominence in funerals, now considered undesirable"; 4) banning overt ritual that would "attract attention implies that funerals could arouse dangerous sentiments among the people," thus causing civil disorder. *Ritual Lament*, 18. According to Alexiou, at least in Greece the gradual replacement of the clan cults "involved a gradual transfer of ritual, and of all the emotive feeling attached to it … to the hero of the state cult; the same athletic contests, rich sacrifices and offerings, choral *enkómia* and *thrêoi*, tragic choruses and lamentation, persisted [as] … part of a public festival open to all." *Ritual Lament*, 18-19. For further discussion, see Tablet 10.3 of the *Twelve Tables*, which states, "The women shall not tear their faces nor wail on account of the funeral." Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 299, and Plutarch, "Solon," 463.

302. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 170.

303. In addition, funerary inscriptions reveal women (in several types of *collegia*) bearing titles of office such as *quinquennalis, curator, quaestor, sacerdos, decurio,* and *honorata.* Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 208.

Salvia Marcellina, daughter of Caius, who “gave as gift to the *collegium* of Aesculapius and Hygeia a place for a shrine with a trellis and a marble statue.”[304] Clearly Roman women were active in all aspects of commemoration of the dead. Presumably, this high degree of involvement extended into the Christian era.

Conclusion: Greco-Roman Women and Funerary Rituals

Based on the survey just completed, the extent and importance of women involved in matters pertaining to death, burial, and commemoration are significant. Greco-Roman tradition positioned women as specialists in funerary practice.

That is not to say that women were the exclusive agents of mortuary rituals; members of the *familia* included men (husbands, fathers, sons, grandfathers, brothers, freedmen, and male slaves) as well as women (mothers, wives, daughters, grandmothers, sisters, freedwomen and female slaves).[305] Certainly the men of the *familia* were involved when members of the household (*domus*) died. However, this thesis argues that women were specialists in matters of death in the family because death was the jurisdiction of the domestic realm of which women, particularly the *mater*, were responsible; consequently, within the household (*domus*) the rituals, the *sacra* (domestic religiosity) associated with matters of death were part of the responsibilities of women. The *sacra* associated with death were accepted and expected as part of domestic religiosity of the Greco-Roman

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304. Tulloch, “Family Funerary Banquets,” 170.

305. Refer again to Osiek’s definition of *familia*, “blood family, freedmen/women, slaves, and others attached to the household).” Osiek, “Roman and Christian Burial,” 247. Combine that definition with Saller’s perception of *familia*: “the wider kinship group encompassed by the *domus*” where *domus* is the “physical house, the household including family and slaves, the broad kinship group including agnates and cognates, ancestors and descendants, and the patrimony.” Richard P. Saller, “*Familia*, *Domus*, and the Roman Conception of the Family,” *Phoenix* 38.4 (Winter 1984): 337, 342.

people. It was the duty of kinswomen to perform the *sacra* correctly on behalf of the *familia*; further, women performed the *sacra* in family settings interwoven with all the human events pertaining to the "cycle of life."[306]

To review the contributions of women in matters of death, the key assumptions of this thesis are summarized below. The activities involved (but were not necessarily exclusive to)[307] women:

1) ***Preparation for Death***: a) women were present at the deathbed; b) the *mater* (wife/mother) supervised the proceedings in the domestic setting; c) women made the dying person physically and emotionally comfortable; c) they straightened the limbs in anticipation of death; d) they caught the final breath in a last kiss, and e) they placed the coin (*viaticum*) on the tongue of the deceased.

2) ***Rituals Immediately Following Death***: a) women extinguished the fire in the hearth, then poured the ashes over their heads; b) they unbound their hair and let it hang loose; c) they tore their clothing, and scraped their faces and arms in grief; d) they closed the eyes and mouth of the deceased; e) they began wailing and gesturing in grief; f) their spontaneous *góos* was accompanied by the *conclamatio* (repetitive calling of the name of the deceased); g) they lifted the body from the bed to the floor (*depositio*), then onto a bier, and h) they washed, anointed, powdered the face, dressed, and bedecked the corpse with a floral garland/crown.

3) ***The Wake (Próthesis):*** a) women moved the deceased, now lying on the bier, to the *atrium*; b) they ensured the feet of the corpse pointed toward the main entrance of the

306. Frankfurter, *Roman Egypt*, 131.

307. As already mentioned, regional and class diversity determined these behaviors.

domus; c) they draped a finely decorated coverlet (possibly made by the women) over the corpse; d) they attached a branch of cypress or spruce to the door of the house to announce the presence of death; e) they scattered vegetation/spices and set out candles and lanterns around the corpse on display; f) the *praeficae* and musicians (possibly women) arrived and began the formal *nenia*/lament while the kinswomen joined the refrain antiphonally; g) women accompanied the singing/chanting with gestures—raised their hands over their heads, pulled at their hair, reached out toward the deceased with the right hand, and beat their breasts; h) they ripped their clothing and exposed their breasts as they clawed at their cheeks to draw blood and moved in rhythmical dance to the music, and i) the *mater* served as "chief mourner," sitting at the end of the bier cradling the head of the deceased in her hands while the guests and the men of the family arrived to pay respects.

4) ***The Funeral Procession (Ekphorá or Pompa)***: a) women dressed in black/dark clothing; b) they gathered with the rest of the family, friends, and guests outside the house with the *praeficae* and musicians while the deceased, now on the bier, was carried on the shoulders of male kinsfolk or placed in the back of a wagon; c) they followed along as the procession set off through the streets toward the cemetery; c) they helped to carry torches, lamps, vegetation, spices, perfumes, and incense-burners; d) they danced, gestured, wailed and joined in the *nenia* led by the *praeficae*, and e) they carried gifts/offerings (produced domestically) to the gravesite.

5) ***The Burial/Disposal of the Body:*** a) the *mater* may provide the tomb or gravesite for the burial/cremation of family members; b) similarly, a wealthy or aristocratic *matrona* may furnish a gravesite for deceased members of her *collegia*; c) women

continued the *conclamatio* and now added the *vale* (bidding farewell) and the *anáklesis* (invoking the departed to rise again); d) as the funeral oration concluded, women sang the *nenia* accompanied by an *aulós* player (possibly female); e) women presented gifts/offerings to be buried or cremated with the corpse, and f) they functioned as hostesses and/or assisted in the serving and cleanup when a graveside meal of wine and sacrificial meat was held.

6) ***Commemoration of the Dead:*** a) women organized the household purification rites and then bathed following the burial of the deceased; b) they continued to lament for the next nine days; c) they planned, organized, cooked, served and/or hosted the ninth day funeral banquet (*refrigerium*) at the gravesite; d) they put aside portions of the funerary meal to share with the deceased; e) they hosted subsequent banquets on feast days prescribed by the Roman calendar; f) they ensured that libations of wine were offered to the dead (poured over the grave or down the libation pipes) at each feasting occasion; g) they celebrated with the men (and the spirits of the dead) at these gravesite banquets well into the night; h) they regularly carried grave offerings (food, drink, clothing, and other comforts) to the cemetery for deceased relatives; i) they could be patrons of memorials for family and *collegia*, and j) they sponsored grave markers, statues, monuments, and shrines as memorials of the dead.

To conclude, the roles of Greco-Roman women in funeral practices are now detailed; the next task is to compare them with those performed by early Christian women still operating within the domestic religiosity of the household. How similar were the roles? The next chapter will provide some interesting answers.

Chapter Four

Women, Funerary Rituals, and Christian Identity

The intention of this chapter is to develop the argument that women played a crucial role in the domestic religiosity pertaining to death for Christian families in late antiquity. I argue that Roman women converting to the new religion continued their roles as ritual specialists in death, burial, and commemoration of the dead with few changes. Christian families maintained the Roman funeral process as part of the same domestic piety (popular religion) practiced in generations past.[308] I make this case because nothing in the ancient sources indicates that the emerging church was interested in rituals related to domestic matters; the bishops were more concerned with doctrine and combating heresies in the early years.[309] Eric Rebillard suggests, "This might explain not only why Christians continued traditional [Roman] practices [around death] but also why the bishops did not attempt to stop them"—the two parts of Christianity simply had different agendas.[310] It was not until the late fourth century that the church hierarchy (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome) decided to question the family's role in Christian death.[311] Until then, funerary concerns, left as they were to the Christian *familia* in its private domestic space,

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308. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 28–29.

309. Ramsay MacMullen argues that the established church at this time consisted of "a hierarchy, an enforced credo, a theology, a single and obligatory liturgy, a pressing sense of the hereafter, and moral imperatives." MacMullen, *Second Church,* 96. A similar observation is made by Eric Rebillard who notes that the bishops' concern in the third and fourth centuries was to control what was "relevant for salvation" and what should "be taken care of by the ecclesiastical institution"; the rest was left "to the care of the family." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead,* xii–ix.

310. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, xii.

311. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 28-29. See Augustine's response to family funerary rituals in Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura pro Mortuis Gerenda* (On the care of the dead), edited by Philip Schaff and translated by H. Brown, vol. 3 of *NPNF-1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887), 4.451.

were largely in the hands of family caregivers, the women. Yet, the issue was not about women *per se*. Rather, the bishops and "the masses" had reached a point of divergence associated with the rise of cult of the martyred saints in a culture that had always demanded concern for the welfare of family including ancestors—a focus for Greco-Romans (and early Christians) that was evident in the maintenance of close relationships between the living and the dead.[312] In fact, the "bishops and the masses" parted ways on several fronts. MacMullen explains,

> They had different ideas about the language of gesture and voice that one should use toward the divine, its style or propriety; different ideas about the reality of relations with the dear departed; and their own sense of what were the best answers for ordinary people faced with the needs of this secular life, not those of the life to come.[313]

According to Peter Brown, it was not until the late fourth century that church authorities began to criticize domestic rituals regarding the dead; church concerns focused more on propriety than on complete rejection of the funerary rites and the bishops certainly did not introduce or demand a new set of rituals to replace the domestic practices at this time. However, there arose "a lively debate about 'superstition' within the Christian church"; it centered on alleged "impropriety" at cemeteries by Christians living in the Mediterranean region.[314] For example, Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and Augustine, bishop in Hippo, "attempted to restrict among their Christian congregations certain funerary customs, most notably the habit of feasting at the graves of the dead"

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312. Brown explains the tension that existed "between the family and the community," that is, the divergence between the "pre-Christian" domestic practices concerning certain funerary customs and the church's focus on theology. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 26–27.

313. MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 95.

314. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 28.

(family tombs and martyr-shrines).[315] By the early fifth century Jerome associated 'superstition' with Christians of "incorrect belief," meaning Christians among the 'vulgar' classes who practiced the folk traditions (apparently this included all women), and any "excesses" or "superstitious overtones" in the practices associated with the cult of the martyrs must be attributed to "the simplicity of laymen, and certainly [the simplicity] of religious women."[316] John Chrysostom, while in his ecclesiastical position in Antioch, used his homilies to condemn the 'pagan' behaviors associated with Christian funerals.[317] In general terms, the interest of the various bishops in domestic-based rituals focused on decorum rather than substantive theological issues.

During the fifth through seventh century ecclesiastical complaints about traditional funerary practices increased. Christian families largely ignored the objections and clung to their popular piety. By the early eighth century, after centuries of complex processes of resistance and assimilation involving laity, clergy, and monastics, "Christian" funerary rituals were finally formulated. In 750 C.E. the nuns of the abbey at Chelles, at the request of the Frankish bishops, produced a liturgy for sickness, death, and burial; this *sacramentary* became known as the "Vatican Gelasian," the forerunner of *extrema unctio* in the early middle ages.[318] The funerary liturgy would not be sanctioned

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315. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 28.

316. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 28.

317. John Chrysostom's sermons delivered in Antioch rail against "the madness about funerals" and claim that traditional mourning (weeping, pulling the hair, beating the breast) should be renounced by Christians, especially the use of *praeficae* who are "pagan" (in the pejorative sense). John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 85.5. For discussion of Chrysostom's sermons, see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 132–33.

318. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 102–03, 194.

as the sacrament, *Extreme Unction* (the last rites of the Catholic Church), until the Council of Trent (1545–63).

This short history implies a continuation of previous Roman domestic religious practices and, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the recognition that women, as the custodians of the *sacra privata,* served as ritual specialists. This implication is the backbone of my thesis and it will now be argued in detail as one sifts through the evidential 'crumbs' for supportive validation that Christian women did indeed serve as ritual specialists within the context of funeral practice.

To provide structure for the argument of this chapter, I will use the same categories as employed in the previous discussion regarding the Roman funeral. For this chapter however, the object is to identify and analyze the actions of early Christian women in the family's domestic response to death. The funeral process is broken down as follows: 1) preparation for death; 2) rituals immediately following death; 3) the laying-in-state or wake (*próthesis*); 4) the carrying-out (Gk. *ekphorá*) and funeral procession (*pompa*); 5) burial/disposal of the corpse at the tomb/gravesite, and 6) commemorative celebrations for the deceased. I will demonstrate that the evidence—literary, non-literary, and material culture—reveals that over the course of roughly seven centuries Christian women continued in the domestic sphere as ritual specialists in matters of death; women as Christians preserved private family rites for death, and in so doing assisted in the formation of a Christian identity.

The Christian Funeral in Late Antiquity

What did the Christian funeral in the Latin west look like in late antiquity (200-800 C.E.)? Rebillard's scholarship makes a crucial observation:

> The notion that the church sought to assume collective responsibility for the relations between the living and the dead is closely linked to the idea that there was a Christian ritual for death and burial [in the first place]. However, there are only scattered data in the sources. … It appears that the church was no more involved in developing ritual for death and burial than it was, for example, for marriage. These issues are important because we know that mourning is a social process and that ritual plays an important part in it. The role the church expected to play in this process is indicative of the one it intended to have in the lives of Christians generally …[and] the relationships of the Christian church and society [by the middle ages] were different from what they were in late antiquity.[319]

As far as Christian doctrine, it was not until Augustine's treatise, *On the Care of the Dead* in the fifth century that it becomes clear in terms of Christian teaching that obsequies for the dead, including burying the body, were not necessary for the salvation of the spirit of the deceased (and the resurrection of his/her body); in fact, argued Augustine, not even burial next to a martyr was a guarantee of salvation and resurrection, unless the deceased led a good life and the surviving loved ones (working through the holy church) pray for him/her by doing good works, giving alms, and making oblations (offerings/sacrifice to God in the holy eucharist).[320] Rebillard maintains that Augustine's arguments raised radical "distinctions" between the 'private– domestic' (funerals and consolation to the living) and the 'church–sacred' (prayer, the eucharist, alms for salvation).[321] While, according to Rebillard, Augustine "raised" these distinctions, these

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319. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 123–24.

320. Augustine, *Treatises*, 6–9.22. For discussion of Augustine's remarks on death, see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 132–33.

321. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 132.

distinctions are very reflective of the *sacra privata* and *sacra publica* of Roman society. In other words, Augustine reflects the continuation of the separation associated with the Roman ideas of *sacra publica* and *sacra privata*, which supported the maintenance of domestic piety and familial rituals and permitted women to function as ritual specialists within this context of domestic piety.

Preparation for Death

Chapter three itemized the Roman rites in the preparation for death as follows: 1) the gathering of kinsfolk around the deathbed as part of the their duty and collective identity; 2) the courageous attitude (most probably idealized) of the individual facing death; 3) administering *viaticum* as protection for the deceased as he/she passed into the realm of death; 4) straightening the limbs to allow the soul to exit the body, and 5) catching the last breath in a kiss. How did these rituals translate for Roman families once they converted to the new Christian faith in late antiquity?

First, several hagiographies by male authors relate the events leading up to Christian deaths. For instance, Gerontius writes that Melania the Younger's community of nuns gathered round her deathbed in the fourth century and that Melania was courageous and strong as she prepared to die.[322] Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa describes how his sister Macrina tried to distract those gathered at her side as she prepared to die, saying she dispelled "the grief from our hearts by means of her sweet words, even though

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322. Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, edited and translated by Carolinne White (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), 66–67.227-29.

her breathing was now weak and distressed … I was inspired … that she had transcended our common human nature … and did not fear separation from this life."[323]

Second, the administering of *viaticum* now involved eucharistic bread and/or wine (communion) for Christians. This funerary procedure experienced something of a transformation from Roman-to-Christian but retained its purpose as sustenance and protection for the deceased's journey into the afterlife. By the fifth century, under Pope Leo the Great, every Christian was assured *viaticum* before death provided they also requested penance from a priest.[324] Even if the person "lost consciousness or speech" before death, as long as someone could vouch that the person had requested penance at some time prior to death, then *viaticum* (in the form of eucharistic wine) "was poured into their mouths."[325] The question of whether women administrated the *viaticum* shall be dealt with shortly.

The use of the eucharist as *viaticum* for spiritual and emotional sustenance during serious illness leading to death is verified by Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century. Gregory relates that his elderly father (also a bishop) "strengthened himself often during the day [during his final illness] and even hourly" with the eucharist alone.[326] If Christian clergy were utilizing eucharistic *viaticum* prior to death, we may assume the laity was doing likewise. In fact, *viaticum* is mentioned in an inscription dating from the fourth

323. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 22.37.

324. Henry G. J. Beck, *The Pastoral Care of Souls in South-East France During the Sixth Century* (Rome: Pontificae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1950), 200.

325. Beck, *Pastoral Care*, 200.

326. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 96. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio Funebris in Patrem*, (Oration on the death of his father), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, vol. 7 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 18.38. Also *Gregory of Nazianzus*, edited by Brian E. Daley (London: Routledge, 2006), 184–85.

century, for a child, Julia Florentina, who was born a pagan but died at eighteen months of age after becoming a Christian.[327] As Julia Florentina was dying, she received communion (we are not told from whom, but quite possibly/probably from her mother—this is discussed further in the next section); however, when Julia Florentina lived on for another four hours she was “able to receive the accustomed [Latin, *consueta*] rites again” indicating the eucharist was administered a second time to the dying child.[328] Another example appears in a letter from Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, to Fabian in which Dionysius tells of one elderly Serapion who was dying and requested his grandson fetch the priest so he might receive communion before he died; the boy was given a “small portion of the eucharist” to carry back to his grandfather who happily received and “straightway gave up the ghost” in peace.[329] Importantly, these examples provide the implicit or explicit implication that the eucharist was being taken in locations outside of the church—the eucharist was administered in domestic private places. Moreover, in one instance, it was a family member who administered the eucharist to the dying.

However, the handling of eucharistic *viaticum* was the subject of some confusion from the end of the fourth century until the middle ages; the official stances of the churches varied by region. Regardless of the inconsistency in the official position, it is clear that the eucharist was being used/handled domestically. In 379 Basil of Caesarea announced that laypeople could “take communion in the hand without the presence of a priest” and they could “keep the communion in their homes and partake of it when they

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327. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 96.

328. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 96.

329. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, edited and translated by Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, LCL 265 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 6.44.4.

like."[330] In 325 at the Council of Nicaea (canon 13), the bishops made *viaticum* "the central rite for the dying"; this was ratified in 441 at the Council of Orange (canon 3), which stated, "Communion given at death is for the consolation of the dying" and "it has been aptly called by the [Church] Fathers a *Viaticum*."[331] Notably, with these rulings the church sanctioned the use of what in the old Roman rituals was termed "a provision for the journey to the other world"; thus, the relevance of the Christian's reception of *viaticum* was now "related to the comfort derived from a ritual action that maintained a connection with the practices of generations of men and women in antiquity."[332] It was a continuation of Roman funerary customs.

Yet who was receiving the *viaticum* became an issue of debate for church authorities beginning in the fourth century. It had come to the attention of the bishops that the eucharist was being given not only to the dying but also to the dead; that is, to corpses. In an attempt to counter this "abuse," prohibitions were issued in 393 at the Council of Hippo (canon 5) and again shortly afterward in 397 at the Third Council of Carthage (canon 6), but the practice persisted.[333] Subsequent rulings to forbid *viaticum* to

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330. Rush discusses the "easy access" to the eucharist that existed in the fourth century. A. C. Rush, "The Eucharist: The Sacrament of the Dying in Christian Antiquity," *The Jurist* 34 (1974): 30–31.

331. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 36. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 93–100. For specifics on these church councils/synods, see *Seven Councils*. For records of the councils in Latin, see *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, edited by J. D. Mansi (Florence and Venice, 1759–98; repr. Paris, 1901–27; repr. in Gallica eBook, 2001), councils are organized by date in volumes 7–13. http://www.patristique.org/Mansi-Sacrorum-conciliorum-nova-et-amplissima-collectio.html, (accessed July 26, 2011).

332. Paxton, *Christianizing Death,* 33. Further, according to Rush, *viaticum* was "a Christian substitution" for the pagan practice of paying the ferryman for safe passage into the afterlife; Christians had simply accommodated the persistent traditional "popular beliefs." Rush, *Death and Burial*, 93.

333. For both the Council of Hippo in 393 (canon 5) and the Third Council of Carthage in 397 (canon 6), see *SC*, vol.3.

the dead occurred at three more church councils in the sixth and seventh centuries.[334] The criterion of embarrassment indicates that the church's attempts to eradicate the practice of giving *viaticum* to the dead basically failed.

A third Roman custom—straightening of the limbs—was also adopted as preparation for death among Christians. One example is given in the hagiography of Melania the Younger whose sisters in the monastery, gathered at her bedside and took direction from Melania herself about positioning her arms and legs as she died.[335] In another example, Gregory of Nyssa reports that his sister Macrina did not need her limbs straightened for "her whole body had automatically taken the right position" in death.[336]

Fourth, at the very moment of death as the soul (the last breath) left the body, the catching of the last breath—the final kiss—was incorporated from the Roman as a Christian practice, at least in some areas. For example, Melania the Younger gave "the kiss of peace" to each of the sisters in her monastic community in Jerusalem prior to her death.[337]Ambrose, bishop of Milan, writes that he imparted "the kiss of peace" at his brother Satyrus' death and we know the last kiss was "in vogue in the church in Syria" in the late fourth century.[338] However, in Gaul the situation was quite the opposite; the

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334. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 93, 98. For more on the prohibitions against providing *viaticum* to corpses, see *SC*, vol. 8 for the Council of Carthage in 525; *SC*. vol. 9 for the Council of Auxerre in 578 (canon 12); *SC*, vol. 12 for the Council of Trullo in 691 (canon 83).

335. Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 68.229.

336. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 107. Also Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*. 25.39–40.

337. Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 68.229.

338. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 104. On Ambrose's declaration that he is about to perform the last kiss and the Vale at the funeral of Satyrus his brother, see Ambrose, *De Obitu Satyri* (On the death of Satyrus), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, in vol. 10 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885)), 1.78.173.

Council of Auxerre in 578 (canon 12) “forbade the people … to impart a kiss to the dead.”[339] So while the criterion of embarrassment confirms that Christians were in fact catching the final gasps of their loved ones well into the sixth century, at the same time it is apparent that church reaction to these practices was inconsistent even in the sixth century and varied from region to region in the West.

Women and Preparation for Death

From the previous chapter describing the Roman rites for death, we learned that the family’s death-vigil involved immediate kinsfolk—notably the women. Women were also reported on the scene at the time of Christian deaths in late antiquity. In the section above, we deduced that the final kiss persisted among Christians into the sixth century in Gaul and we might suppose the church legislation against ‘the kiss of peace’ (ca. 578) was an attempt to wean the Christian laity from the old Roman domestic ritual for death. Furthermore, because tradition called for the nearest relative (mother or wife) to impart the kiss, we can assume that Christian laywomen continued to perform this ritual when death occurred. In addition, the hermeneutic of suspicion suggests the likelihood that the practice may have continued beyond the sixth century since “the formal canons of codified patriarchal law are generally more restrictive” than the actual lives of the people they govern.[340] Of course, related to the kiss of peace was the practice of straightening the limbs. As revealed by Gerontius in the *Vita* of Melania the Younger, the nuns keeping vigil at Melania’s deathbed asked that she tell them when death was imminent so they

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339. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 105. See *SC*, vol. 9 for the Council of Auxerre in 578 (canon 12).

340. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 108–09.

could straighten her legs as she was “departing from her body.”[341]We recall the intention of the rite was to provide easy passage of the soul through the body so it could exit through the mouth in a final breath.[342] According to Gerontius, when the nuns asked that Melania tell them when the moment of death was imminent, Melania answered from the deathbed, “To be sure, I will let you know,”[343] indicating that she and her fourth century monastic community were in full compliance with the Roman custom and had embraced it as suitable for Christian practice as well.

A number of ‘evidential crumbs’ in various texts also associate women with the use of the eucharistic *viaticum* for the dead. This involvement is conflicted; however, it is there. In other words, women acquired, handled, and administered the eucharist as part of their domestic practices associated with family dying and death rituals. A re-assessment of the information about Christian *viaticum*—this time using the hermeneutical toolbox—will illustrate how this conclusion is reached.

First, in the matter of serious and fatal illness and the healing properties of the eucharistic *viaticum*, we learn that in sixth century Gaul from the (‘androcentric’) sermons of Caesarius of Arles, Christians were being directed to seek assistance for serious/fatal illness from local clergy instead of employing cures and charms from folk practice.[344] This presumes that families (women) were still relying on domestic rituals or

341. Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 68.229.

342. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 91–92. See Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 7.12, 22.

343. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 91. Also Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 68.229.

344. Beck, *Pastoral Care*, 281. According to Caesarius, the bishop of Arles, folk practices such as “magical formulae,” “the burning of scent,” and “auguries” were being used to ward off death, not only by his congregation, but also by clergy in his jurisdiction. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, Sermon 50.

magic to deal with the danger of death among kinsfolk. Mothers would go to the church to receive the eucharist and obtain blessed oil for the purpose of blessing themselves and their sick children once they returned home.[345] Further, the Spanish bishops at two councils—Saragossa in 380 and Toledo in 400—decreed "anathema for those who receive the eucharist in church and do not swallow it (presumably to make use of it elsewhere)." [346] By using the hermeneutic of suspicion, one may assume that laypeople (perhaps women) were in the habit of not swallowing the consecrated eucharist at church and were carrying it home for use in domestic situations. Corroborating this supposition is a decree at the Council of R(h)eims, 624–30, which strictly forbade females from carrying viaticum to those who were dying—indicating that this practice must have been prevalent.[347] Furthermore, it seems the handling of the eucharist by the laity (particularly women) remained an issue until at least 915; among the church canons collected by the *Regino of Prüm* is one that required the bishop "to inquire whether the parish priest gives communion to the sick with his own hand and whether he gives communion to a layman or woman, to be brought to the sick."[348] The *Regino* confirms that female caregivers continued to bring *viaticum* to the sick and dying, and this, despite the censure of

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345. Beck, *Pastoral Care*, 247, 248 n29.

346. The Council of Saragossa (canon 3) and the First Council of Toledo (canon 4) ruled on this "abuse" of the eucharist. Rush, "The Eucharist," 31.

347. The Council of R(h)eims (ca. 624–630) is reported in *Concilium Sub Sonnatio Episcopo Remensi Habitum* in *Concilia Aevi Merovingici*, edited by Friedrich Maassen (Hanover, 1893), 204. See also *SC*, vol. 10.

348. Rush, "The Eucharist," 31. On this eucharistic ruling, see *Catholic Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Regino of Prüm" under "Collection of Ancient Canons," http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03281a.htm (accessed July 29, 2011). Further, Rush, *Death and Burial*, 99n43. Note, the canon collection of *Regino* (915) is beyond the scope of my study but does demonstrate the issues perceived by the bishops about laypeople (especially women) distributing the eucharist to Christians who were dying.

women's administration of *viaticum* nearly three hundred years earlier at the Council of Rheims.[349] Again, the hermeneutic of suspicion begs the conclusion that women retained their role as primary healers/caregivers and funerary ritualists in the family—they persisted in handling and administering the eucharist in domestic settings despite ecclesiastical reproach. Specifically, they had incorporated certain Christian practices for their family needs when it came to sickness, dying, and death.[350]

A second aspect regarding women and their handling of eucharistic *viaticum* is that in late antiquity the eucharist was easily accessible to Christian laity and perhaps women especially. This is confirmed by the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Novatian, which reveal that the domestic (private) use of the eucharist was very common.[351] Christian laity "kept the eucharist at home or on their persons in a locket" as

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349. For more about the Council of R(h)eims (ca. 624–630) forbidding females from carrying *viaticum* to the dying, see A. J. Schulte who explains it was Hincmar, the archbishop of Reims, who required "diocesan visitors to inquire whether the priests gave communion to the sick with their own hands or by others … and whether they gave the consecrated particle to any layperson … to carry it home for the sake of giving it to the dying." See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Viaticum," edited by Augustin Joseph Schulte in vol. 15 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912). Note that in the sixth century in some regions, even though women's reception of the eucharist at church was restricted, they were still receiving communion. For example, in the parishes under Caesarius of Arles, a woman could receive communion if her hand was veiled "with a white cloth called the *dominicalis*. Beck, *Pastoral Care*, 150. One of Caesarius' sermons describes the word *dominicalis* as used in the orders of the Council of Auxerre, 573–603 (canon 36), which forbids females from reception of the eucharist with the bare hand, and stipulates (canon 42) that a woman may not receive the host unless she has on her person at the time of communion the white linen cloth (or veil) called the *dominicalis*; alternatively, the *dominicalis* may have been the name of the woman's veil worn over her head when in the church and was used for the reception of the eucharist. Caesarius, *Sermon*, 227.44. In any case, women with the *dominicalis* received the eucharist. Consequently, it follows that women may have used the *dominicalis* as a 'vehicle' for transporting the eucharistic *viaticum* from church to the home or the cemetery to administer to the dying or the dead.

350. The use of the eucharist (*viaticum*) in terms of treating the sick in late antiquity is the topic of another dissertation and therefore beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, in terms of healing, Christianity later links *unction* (anointing of the sick) with the rites of dying and again, this particular subject as it pertains to the role of women requires investigation in another project.

351. Tertullian, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage: To His Wife, On Monogamy*, vol. 13 of ACW, edited by J. Quasten and J. C. Plumpe (New York: Paulist Press, 1951), 130; Cyprian, *De Lapsis* (On the lapsed), edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, translated by Ernest Wallis, treatise 3 in vol. 5 of

a recourse against illness or accident.[352] For instance, upon rising and before a morning meal, Christians would first "partake of the eucharist" because "it was regarded as a medicine of immortality"; moreover, "on a journey they would carry it with them against the dangers of traveling or as a protection if death overtook them."[353] The consecrated eucharistic particles were therefore easily available for the physical (and spiritual) health of the family; we might also presume that women, as managers of the home, were the custodians of those consecrated particles. For example, in *Dialogues* (ca. 580), Gregory the Great reveals that the nun Romula, close to death, called her superior, Redempta, and asked for *viaticum*"; the account suggests but does not state that Redempta brought the eucharist to Romula for her reception before death.[354] A further example can be found in the (androcentric) writings of Gerontius, the fourth century biographer of the wealthy Christian ascetic, Melania the Younger. Gerontius, writing Melania's *Vita* (ca.439), relates, "It was the custom among the Romans to place the Eucharistic host in the person's mouth when the soul was departing."[355] The *Vita* also records Melania "providing" *viaticum* for her uncle Volasium not once but three times so he would have the sacred sustenance in his mouth "at the time of death"; in addition, Melania herself was fortified for death with the eucharistic *viaticum* three times before she died.[356] While

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Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 26.256, and Novatian, *De Spectaculis*, edited by G. Hartel, CSEL 3 (1871), 3.5.5. Also see Rush, "The Eucharist," 17.

352. Rush, "The Eucharist," 17.

353. Rush, "The Eucharist," 17.

354. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, edited by Edmund G. Gardner, book I (London: P. Lee Warner, 1911), 524.

355. Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 68.229. Also see Rush, "The Eucharist," 32.

356. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 96–97. Also Gerontius, *Melania the Younger*, 66–68.227–29.

these accounts are not explicit (did the women, they imply that Romula, Redempta, and Melania (all Christians) not only approved and accepted the Roman custom of *viaticum* as a preparation for death, but also practiced the ritual privately. And while it is not clear if the women themselves or a priest/bishop "provided" the eucharist, these accounts, along with the story of the child Julia Florentina (previous section), suggest—with assistance from the hermeneutics of suspicion and an understanding of androcentric texts—that women (daughters, mothers, nuns) performed the administration of the eucharist privately to family or to members of their religious communities.

Rituals Immediately Following Death

Again, to recap from chapter three, the Roman rites performed after death are as follows: 1) closing the eyes and mouth; 2) the *conclamatio*, the repeated calling of the name of the deceased; 3) lamentation begins; 4) the *depositio*, the lifting of the corpse off the bed onto the ground; 5) washing and anointing the body, and 6) clothing and crowning the body in preparation for the *próthesis* or wake. This section will analyze how these Roman customs compared to the Christian response immediately after death occurred.

Eusebius, in *Historia Ecclesiastica*, cites a pastoral letter that relates how Christians in Alexandria during the third century responded to the deaths of fellow citizens during the plague: "With willing hands they … closed their eyes and mouths, carried them on their shoulders, and laid them out; they clung to them, embraced them, washed them and wrapped them in grave-clothes."[357] This brief description confirms the

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357. Eusebius, *Historia*, 7.22.

early Christian continuation of Roman rituals: closing the eyes and mouth, and washing and dressing the body. It will be helpful to consider each custom in turn.

As a Roman custom, the 'closing the eyes' was to be performed by the "closest relative." The custom seems to have survived into the Christian era, at least in some of the hagiography. Ambrose, bishop of Milan mentions that he closed the eyes of his deceased brother Satyrus[358]; Gregory of Nyssa kept his promise to his sister Macrina to "close her eyes with [his] hands,"[359] and Augustine writes that he closed his mother Monica's eyes when she died.[360] The criterion of embarrassment suggests that if the Church Fathers performed this Roman ritual, presumably the laity did likewise.

As for the *conclamatio* and lamentation, the bishop Zeno of Verona (ca. 350–80) spoke critically of a widow who called the name of her deceased husband even during the "solemn services" for him in the church.[361] Gregory of Nyssa attests that upon the death of his sister Macrina, a great lamentation broke out among her friends and sisters in Christ.[362] And with respect to the Latin word *depositio*—laying the body onto the earth after death— it eventually became the term for the Christian burial in the ground or in a tomb underground.[363]

Christian families continued to wash the bodies of their deceased. In the *Apocryphal New Testament*, the *Acts of Peter*, "Marcellus took Peter down from the cross

358. Ambrose, *De Obitu Satyri*, 1.34.

359. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 25–27.39–41.

360. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 9.12, 29.

361. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 109, 183–84.

362. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 26.40–41.

363. Regarding "*depositio*" see Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 44.

and washed him with milk and wine."[364] Gregory of Nazianzus also implies the washing of the dead by Christians in his treatise, *Oratio*.[365] In addition, in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* by John Rufus we learn that in Gaza, Palestine the body of the bishop Peter was washed by members of his Christian community when he died.[366] As mentioned above, Christian families also accepted the Roman custom of anointing the body both in illness and in preparation for burial.[367] In the seventh century Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, reported that the bodies of priests and monks were anointed "with holy oil on the forehead, mouth, breast, hands, and feet immediately after death."[368] We also discussed in the last section that Christian mothers and/or their children were taking vessels to the church in Arles (sixth century) for blessed *chrism* (oil). We might presume from that information that a portion of the oil was utilized to anoint the body of any member of the family who died in preparation for burial.

According to Tertullian, Christians also applied perfumes abundantly to the bodies of their dead in the Greco-Roman fashion.[369] Minucius Felix argues the reason for

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364. *Acts of Peter*, in *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction*, with English translation by Hans-Josef Klauck (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 104.

365. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio on the Death of His Father*, 18.31.

366. Also John Rufus, *The Life of Peter the Iberian*, edited by Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phoenix Jr., vol. 24 of *SBL Writings of the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 265.

367. Sanctified oil (*chrism*) during at least the fourth century was being ingested as well as applied to the bodies of those seriously ill or dying "and was understood exclusively as a means to physical health." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 29–30. Again, this aspect of healing rituals that were eventually transformed into the Christian liturgy for dying and the role women may have played in the performance of the rituals is the subject of future research.

368. Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial: An Introductory Survey of the Historical Development of Christian Burial Rites* (London: Alcuin Club/S.P.C.K., 1977), 30.

369. Tertullian, *The Apologeticus of Tertullian*, translated by T. R. Glover, LCL 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 193.

this practice was because Christians resisted perfumes as needless luxuries during life intentionally reserving such extravagance for death.[370] Gregory of Nyssa reports that large amounts of spices and perfumes were used in preparing the body of Meletius (the bishop of Antioch) for his laying out in the church.[371]

Once the body was washed, anointed, and perhaps treated with perfumes and spices, Christians, in the Roman custom, dressed the corpse. For example, in the second century *Acts of John*, Drusianna is dressed very simply "in her shift and grave clothes."[372] The use of plain linen is also mentioned in the writings. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa relates that the bishop Meletius' body was clothed in "pure linen" for burial; Jerome mentions wrapping the body of a woman "in a linen winding-sheet," and Prudentius reports the spreading of "linen clothing of pure whiteness over the corpse."[373] However, these references show the distinct bias of the ascetic agenda within some areas of early Christianity. We know, for instance, that it was also customary for aristocratic Roman-Christians to "adorn the dead in special garments [which] led to exorbitance.[374] The excesses in costly clothing led to censure by certain Church Fathers. In their homilies,

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370. Minucius Felix, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, translated by G. W. Clark, vol. 39 of ACW (New York: Newman Press, 1974), 12.6.

371. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Meletio*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, translated by William Moore, vol. 5 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 171.

372. *Acts of John* in *Apocryphal Acts*, 70–71.27.

373. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Meletio*, 46, 857; Jerome, *To Innocent* in *Principle Works*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, translated by W. H. Fremantle, vol. 6 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1892), 1.12; Prudentius, *Cathemerinon Liber* (Book of daily hymns/poems), translated by R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent, 1905, repr. in Gutenberg eBook, 2005), 10.49–50, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/ world/ readfile?fk_files=1497941 (accessed July 30, 2011). Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 129.

374. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 131.

Basil and John Chrysostom attacked the abuses of dressing corpses in "precious apparel and often in silks and gold."[375] Jerome and Augustine equally deplored the waste of silks and gold vestments on the corpses of the rich.[376] All of the examples, despite the variation in specifics, show the Christians' distinct concern for clothing the corpse.

While the Romans crowned their dead, Tertullian disapproved of crowning Christians when they died in "the fashion of pagans" because a crown treated a corpse too much like a god and was therefore idolatry.[377] Crowning the dead was denounced in letters written by Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century.[378] Using the hermeneutic of suspicion, one might speculate that the complaints indicate Christians simply continued the practice. Into the third century as Christian persecution increased, the church promoted the "crown of martyrdom" as a "substitution" for the Roman crowning of the dead.[379] The *Acts of the Martyrs* contains many references to saints who "received the crown of martyrdom"—Polycarp, Apollonius, Fructuosus, Euplius, and others.[380] In addition, Jerome considered "the crown of roses and violets" a suitable symbol of

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375. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 131. Also Basil, *Homilia in Divites* (Against the rich), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, in vol. 8 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), Homily 7.

376. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 132. See Jerome's Treatise, *Life of Paulus the First Hermit*, edited by Philip Schaff and translated by W. H. Fremantle, vol. 6 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1892), 17; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Expositions on the book of psalms), edited by Philip Schaff and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 8 of NPNF-1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), 49.13.

377. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 34.7. The Church Fathers attempted to persuade Christians that at death they would receive their "crown of life" from God in heaven, or that in dying for Christ they would win the "crown of martyrdom," and that living a life of service to God meant they would earn the "crown of lilies." Rush, *Death and Burial*, 140–49.

378. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 141. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 7.16.776.

379. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 145.

380. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 145. Also see *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, under 'Apollonius,' 'Euplius,' 'Fructuosus,' and 'Polycarp.'

martyrdom in the fifth century.[381] Rather than abolish the ritual, the church adapted the symbol by changing its symbolism. The Roman cult of the dead had already simulated the blood sacrifice with alternatives—roses and violets (red and purple)—offered at the grave of the deceased.[382] The Christian discussion moved to "a crown of lilies" awarded to the "new" Christian martyr—no longer someone who witnessed to Christ by his/her death, but —according to Pseudo-Cyprian in *De Duplici Martyrio*—one whose witness to Christ was by the actions of his/her daily life.[383] Of interest is that the garlands used by Christians to adorn the martyrs and departed saints or to place as wreaths upon their graves were fashioned from violets and roses (purple and red), perhaps to extend the symbolism of blood sacrifice.[384]

These rituals, transformed from the Roman customs, became the Christian practice for making ready the deceased for his/her waking in the home (and eventually the church) before burial. To what degree were women involved as ritual specialists? The next section will address that subject.

Women and Rituals Immediately Following Death

Christian women as the nearest relatives most probably closed the eyes and mouths of those who died in the home. We might also presume that the floral garlands used to adorn the martyrs were likely the craft of women. In *The Life of Macrina*,

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381. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 346
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382. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 146, 220.

383. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 148–49.

384. Rush presents ample evidence of the rejection of funeral crowns by the bishops who implied such adornment of the dead was tantamount to idolatry. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 137–49. These repeated criticisms from the church authorities suggests, according to the hermeneutics of suspicion, that the early Christians did indeed persist with the practice of funerary crowns.

Gregory of Nyssa acknowledges that it was the women around Macrina's deathbed who began the lamentations as soon as she died.[385] Furthermore, as seen in the section above, widows were known to burst out with the *conclamatio*, calling the names of their departed husbands during church services and the nuns upon Macrina's death set up "a bitter and irrepressible cry" in lamentation.[386]

Gregory of Nyssa also relates that two women—a deaconess named Lampadion, along with Macrina's close friend Vetiana—assisted him in washing and dressing his sister's body.[387] From Gaul, Gregory of Tours notes that when a girl named Disciola died at the abbey of St. Radegunda, the abbess clothed her in linen.[388] Notably these accounts relate funerary behaviors among the clergy—but women are involved. Less evidence is available however, about events in the typical Christian household upon the death of a child, a spouse, or a parent. Even New Testament scholar Margaret Mitchell bemoans the lack of details about funerary ritual in the New Testament record stating, "Given that the home was the primary venue for death, preparation of the corpse, and mourning, one might expect 1 Timothy's blueprint for the 'household of God' to mention actual deaths and mourning habits of Christians. But it does not."[389] Janet Huskinson, in examining the sarcophagi of Roman/Christian children, draws a similar conclusion; she notes that the

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385. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 26–31.40–43.

386. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 109.

387. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 26–31.40–43.

388. Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* (History of the Franks), translated by Earnest Brehaut (191, repr. in eBook 1996), 6.29, http://www.fordham.edu/ halsall/basis/gregory-hist.asp#book6, (accessed July 27, 2011).

389. Margaret M. Mitchell, "Why Family Matters for Early Christian Literature," in *Early Christian Families in Contest: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 357.

imagery on Christian sarcophagi tend to avoid mourning scenes, making it difficult to determine who in the late-antique family was doing what as far as caring for the dead.[390] Instead, Christian funerary reliefs[391] tend to employ biblical representations or learning themes that display scrolls or the *orans* (originally a Roman female mourning figure).[392] Over all, the sources for Christian women's activity at death are simply meager. We can only assume, since Roman women traditionally performed roles in preparing bodies for burial and, as noted above, many of the practices (anointing the body, closing the eyes, straightening the limbs) and the materials employed (oils, perfumes) are continuations of Roman practice, that Christian women were the agents of these practices too.

The Laying Out or Wake

Once the body of the deceased was washed and anointed, it was dressed and made ready for exposition. The following rites were common to the Roman procedure for the wake: 1) the deceased was placed on the funeral bed or *lectus funebris* (feet toward the door) in the interior *atrium* of the house; 2) the fire in the hearth was extinguished and the kin in mourning poured ash over their heads and smeared ash on their faces and arms; 3) lamentation—the wailing, singing, playing musical instruments, and performing

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390. Janet Huskinson, *Roman Children's Sarcophagi: Their Decoration and its Social Significance* (Oxford, NY: Clarendon Press, 1996), 68–69.

391. Snyder cautions our assumptions about what in the material culture was "pagan" and what was "Christian." He states, "Early Christian symbols were taken from the Greco-Roman world and given a new meaning," which suggests that there was definite overlap, making it difficult to reliably identify what was really the "Christian" material culture. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 23. Furthermore, do we really know for sure "when Christians were willing to make their presence known to the larger public"? *Ante Pacem*, 295.

392. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 288–301. Tulloch explains that the *orans* (*orante*) is a common image found in Christian art and prolific in Rome's catacombs, it is typically a female figure (though a few are male) with arms uplifted in a praying, supplication (mourning?) gesture. Tulloch, "Art and Archaeology," 286–89. If Tulloch is correct in postulating that the *orans* represents real Christian women engaging the viewer in "social discourse" about life and death (also other topics), one wonders if the *orans* simply performed a funerary function—lamentation.

gestures—began in earnest; 4) the deceased was draped with a coverlet and the bier was surrounded with lamps, candles, and various vegetation; 5) the house was marked with a branch of greenery to indicate its pollution; 6) water was placed near the door of the house for visitors to wash away impurity resulting from their visit, and 7) relatives and friends arrived to share in mourning with the family. An assessment of how the Christian adaptations compared to these funerary rites is outlined below.

As Rush points out, the early Christian funeral wakes were private, quiet, and while little reported, indicate similarities to the Roman practices.[393] The *Acts of the Apostles* 9:37 recounts the waking of Dorcas, a female member of the early church community in Jerusalem; after being washed and prepared for burial she was laid for exposition in "a room upstairs" where Peter subsequently came to visit and then raised her from the dead (9: 40–41). The waking of the Christian dead was generally held in the home.[394] However, by the fourth century Christians were being encouraged to bring the deceased to the church for organized prayers and psalm singing prior to burial.[395] Gregory of Tours in the sixth century mentions that the wake for the bishop, Gall, was held in the church.[396] Again, it is not clear how widespread the church-held wake was for laypeople; however, the number of clerical exemplars in the textual accounts may indicate that

393. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 154.

394. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 155.

395. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 160–61. For the account of Paula's death in Palestine and how her body was brought to the church not for a three-day wake of chanting the psalms, but as an exception, the wake lasted for a whole week. See Jerome, *To Eustochium,* in *Principle Works,* 108.30.

396. Gregory of Tours, *Vitae Patrum* (Life of the Fathers), translated by Edward James, vol. 6, of Translated Texts for Historians, 2nd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 7.685. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 162.

additional persuasion was necessary to change the lay practices from private functions in the home to more public celebrations in the local church.

As relatives and friends began arriving to support the bereaved family, a number of behaviors typified the Christian wake. The people joined in calling to the deceased (*conclamatio*) to 'wake' him/her from sleep. Gregory of Nyssa related that, "all the people from the neighboring country streamed towards" the house where his dead sister Macrina was laid out in order to hold "a night-vigil for her" similar to "a martyr's festival."[397] To counter the wailing and "pagan laments," Gregory encouraged orderly psalm-singing by the virgins—the nuns of Macrina's monastery.[398] Similarly, Augustine reported many friends and clergy came to hold wake over Monica, his deceased mother, in her own home.[399] In some locations, because of the very hot climate, the wake was held almost immediately after death at the cemetery, followed by a swift burial. This meant the wake was only one day in duration. In other places, waking the dead could last as long as three days before burial—perhaps in keeping with the three-day wake associated with Greco-Roman and Jewish beliefs "that the soul hovered near the body for three days after death"; this was later adapted for Christianity to symbolize the three days that Christ laid in the tomb before his resurrection.[400]

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397. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 155. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 33.44.

398. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 33–34.44–45.

399. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 9.12.31.

400. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 158–61. *The Apostolic Constitutions* encouraged the people to gather in the cemeteries to read the scriptures and sing psalms for the martyrs and saints "who have fallen asleep in the Lord." *Constitutions of the Apostles*, edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 7 of *ANF*, *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 6.6.30.

As for the decoration at the Christian laying-in-state, there is little information regarding candles, lamps, and vegetation; in addition, there is little about marking the Christian home for death-pollution or providing water for purification as was done in the Greco-Roman tradition. However, according to the *Didascalia*, Christians were not to fear contact with the dead and could "handle the bodies of the dead without incurring any legal defilement or without having recourse to ritual purifications."[401] It would follow, therefore, that Christian families in the later centuries were not required to indicate their homes as 'impure' upon the death of a family member. Regarding the use of candles, Eusebius reports "the body of Constantine [who died a Christian] was surrounded by candles burning in golden candlesticks while the body lay in state."[402] The draping of the corpse for the wake is mentioned by Jerome in the fourth century in a letter to Paula about the death of her daughter, Blaesilla; Jerome describes "the pall made of cloth of gold that covered her bier."[403] Also, Christians in Gaul (sixth century) began to use clerical palls (shrouds) for the purpose of granting the deceased "divine favor"; this practice was denounced at the Council of Clermont in 535 in Auvergne and again at the Council of Auxerre in 578.[404] The imperative read, "The bodies of the dead [shall] not to be wrapped in palls which were used for the divine services …not even the bodies of

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401. *Didascalia Apostolorum,* 22.1–4. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 103.

402. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, vol. 1 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 4.66.

403. Jerome, *To Paula*, in *Principle Works,* 39.1.

404. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 132–33.

priests [are] to be so attired when carried to burial."[405] Apparently to oppose this practice, ecclesiastical legislation sought to stress the church's desire for simplicity.

Lamentation in the form of funeral dirges continued. John Chrysostom indicated his consternation more than once—eight times, in fact— over the hiring by Christian families of "pagan *praeficae*" used to augment the mourning of the dead.[406] Rush explains, "In their attempt to eradicate pagan mourning survivals, the leaders of Christianity had to direct special attention to the women, for they were especially attached to such display."[407]

Women and the Laying Out or Wake

Much of the information above implies the participation of women—their singing, lamenting, and their abundant presence in the Christian waking of the dead. First, it is clear that dirges and lamentation by the women continued into Christianity. The example of Macrina's wake indicates that the sad wailing of the virgins (nuns)

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405. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 131–33. This situation is addressed at the Council of Clermont (canons 3 and 7) and at the Council of Auxerre (canon 12). *Concilia Galliae, A. 511– a. 695,* edited by Carlo de Clercq, CCSL 148A. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963), 860, 861, 913. The word 'pall' comes from the Latin *pallium* or *palla* meaning 'cloak,' which suggests perhaps the vestment worn by late-antique priests; alternately the pallium was a 'garment' or a blanket' so could have been the name of the cover placed over the deceased on the bier; in the middle ages the 'pall' became the cloth to cover the chalice used for the consecrated eucharistic wine. "*Pallium*" in *The Dictionary of Christian Antiquities,* 850–53.

406. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John,* 62.4, 63.1, 85.5, 85.6, 86.1; *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrew*s, 4.7, 4.8, 31.4, Chrysostom contrasts the sad mourning of pagan funeral practices with the joyous celebration in the chanting of psalms proclaiming the glories of Christian resurrection. John Chrysostom, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4.7.385–86.

407. Rush also points out that Christianity was not the first to place restrictions on women for their practices of mourning; the laws of Solon in Greece targeted women. However, Christian condemnation of lamentation was widespread; there were the legislations of Shenoute of Atripe and Pachomius, along with the *Canons of Athanasius* in the eastern churches in an attempt to restrict the behaviors of mourning women. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 181–83. In the west there were strong denunciations by Zeno of Verona (late fourth century) against the violent wailing of widows and mothers in grief. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 183. Notably, this widespread condemnation also shows the prevalence and tenacity of women's practice of lamentation.

required Gregory of Nyssa to redirect the women's mourning toward "the singing of psalms" and the "singing of hymns" at the night-vigil.[408] Gregory of Nazianzus cites his mother as an example of someone who "lulled to sleep her lamentations" (in other words, controlled her emotions) by singing psalms (in preference to wailing and performing lamentation).[409] Further, Jerome suggests that Paula's attitude at the time of her own death was one of joy and rejoicing and her fine example eliminated the need for those at her wake to resort to "howling or wailing as is the usual case"; instead, "the choirs of monks entoned psalms in different languages," perhaps drowning out the "inappropriate lamenting" by the women in attendance.[410]

Second, women's role in funerary dirges had persisted for centuries and official legislation forbidding its performance was simply ineffective. Greek, Roman, and Christian rules about female mourning had failed to "produce much effect among the ordinary people."[411] Certainly everything had been tried: Greek laws postulated by Solon and Plato, the ruling of Lycurgus at Sparta, the Roman *Twelve Tables*, the repetition of the law by Cicero in Rome, and satirical ridicule by Lucian in Samosata.[412] Then there

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408. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 33-34.44–45. See also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 171.

409. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 172. See also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 7.15.773.

410. Jerome, *To Eustochium*, in *Principle Works*, 108.30.

411. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 176–77.

412. Plutarch, *Solon*, 12.4.434. Plato, *Leges* (Laws), Vol. 2, translated by R. G. Bury, LCL 192 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 12.535. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin, in vol. 1 of *Parallel Lives*, LCL 46 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 27.347. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.23, 59. Lucian, *De Luctu* (On Mourning), translated by A. M. Harmon, LCL 130 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 3.12,19.

was denunciation by the church authorities [413] from Origen in Alexandria, Tertullian and Cyprian in Carthage, Basil in Caesarea, John Chrysostom in Constantinople, and Augustine in Hippo—nothing could break the habit of lamenting laywomen.[414] The sermons of the bishops reveal that the performance (gestures of sorrow = *planctus*) of Christian women included soiling their garments in ash/dirt and blackening their faces, pulling their hair and ripping their clothing, scratching their cheeks and arms, beating their breasts, and wailing.[415] And these behaviors became subjects of censorship for the bishops.

Despite specific denunciations in the homilies of John Chrysostom forbidding the use of *praeficae*, Christian families continued to hire these professional female mourners to direct the *nenia* (lament poetry) for their funeral celebrations.[416] Chrysostom reviled the *praeficae* as "this disease of women" whose singing of dirges was "blasphemous."[417] Just who were these women? It seems a brief divergence in order to explain the *praeficae* would be beneficial at this point.

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413. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 176–85. Origen, *Homilia 8 in Genesin*, in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, translated by Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 7.141–43. Tertullian, *De Corona Militis* (On the Military Garland), in *Three Treatises of Tertullian*, edited by G. Currey (London: 1854), 3.15.

414. Tertullian, *Of Patience: Under Bereavement*, edited by Philip Schaff and Allan Menzies, vol. 3 of *ANF* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 9.15; Cyprian, *De Mortalitate* (On the mortality/plague), edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, translated by Ernest Wallis, treatise 7 in vol. 5 of *ANF: Fathers of the Third Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 20.474. Basil, *De Gratiarum Actione* (On the giving of thanks), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, in vol. 8 of *NPNF-2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), Homily 4; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, edited by Philip Schaff, in vol. 10 of *NPNF-1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), Homily 3. A helpful secondary source on the subject is Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 258–60.

415. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 176–85.

416. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 6. Also see Rush, *Death and Burial*, 163.

417. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, 62.4. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 28.

Dutsch argues that a more critical examination of the Amiternum relief (Appendix A., fig. 4) depicting a non-aristocratic Roman *pompa*, proves that the procession to the grave has a particular symbolic arrangement.[418] She suggests there is a reason for the set order of participants: the "musicians and *praeficae* at the head of the procession, the relatives at the end, and the bier in between."[419] According to Diodorus of Sicily, in the *pompae* of aristocratic/imperial Roman families, actors were employed "to impersonate the dead man and his distinguished ancestors" by wearing their masks (Lat. *imagines*) and walking at the front of the procession, which would then place them in the company of the musicians and *praeficae*.[420] Dutsch argues,

> the funeral procession would thus have portrayed the family on a continuum from past to present: first the impersonated ancestors, then the liminal figure of the recently dead member, and finally, the living. In this symbolic configuration, the *praeficae* walking at the head of the procession would then have been associated with the afterlife.[421]

Consequently, the *praeficae* were not only "the ones in charge" (the meaning of the Latin: *praeficae*), but also at the "front," leading the singing of the *nenia*,[422] scratching their faces and arms, wailing, and beating their breasts; in effect, the *praeficae* were

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418. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259.

419. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259.

420. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259. Diodorus of Sicily, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian: In Fifteen Books*, translated by G. Booth (London: 1814), 31.25.2.608. Also, Sumi, "Impersonating the Dead," 559–60.

421. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259–60.

422. The *nenia* (poetic funeral chant of lament accompanied by music from the flute), in its association with the specialized role of the *praeficae* in Roman funerals, was "embedded in an elaborate sequence of rites that accompanied the ultimate transition, the one between life and death." The *nenia* was also closely connected with ritual gestures of mourning led by the *praeficae*; the total performance of lament (*nenia* + gestures + tears + blood/milk + music) as conducted by the hired mourners was believed to possess the power to flatter and appease the dead and lure them magically from the land of the living into the afterlife with the ancestors. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259–60, 272.

“ritual performers enacting grief” without really “feeling genuine grief” because they were hired strangers, not kin.[423] . The *praeficae* were “paid mourners [leading] the deceased to the underworld, where he or she would henceforth belong.”[424] Furthermore, *praeficae* charged for their services, In fact, they had been charging for their services since before the time of the *Twelve Tables,* which limited funeral expenses and forbade excessive lamentations.[425]Despite the injunctions however, Roman families still paid these women who “were selling rather intimate merchandise—their own blood and tears … and … milk”—pressed out from their breasts that they exposed and beat upon during funeral rituals.[426]

This then, is the backstory to the complaints (and perhaps suspicions) the bishops had about the *praeficae*. Was their real issue that Christian families were paying the *praeficae* for insincere and “feigned emotional involvement”? Or that *praeficae* mourned but did not grieve—that they symbolized hypocrisy? Or were the bishops fearful or perhaps envious of the power held by these female ritualists over both the living and the dead?

Regardless of the motivation, the homilies chastising the laity and warning them against the *praeficae* persisted well into late antiquity; but so too did Christian families

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423. Dutsch, “*Nenia*,” 260.

424. Dutsch, “*Nenia*,” 260.

425. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.59.

426. Dutsch, “*Nenia*,” 262–63. The symbolism of milk from the lactating breast of the *praeficae* had to do with care-giving figures such as the nurse or midwife; in this case, however, rather than assisting with the transition at birth, the *praeficae* “acted as caregivers for the dead, liminal figures … assisting them in their transition to the other side.” Dutsch, “*Nenia*,” 272. Servius mentioned that the shades of the dead were sustained on “blood and milk” from the women who escorted the dead to the tomb. Servius, Commentary on Aeneid,

persist in their hiring of *praeficae* to lead the kinswomen and friends of the deceased in ritual lamentation. The tenacity of this practice (if we incorporate the hermeneutics of suspicion) is confirmed by the repeated attempts by church councils and synods to curb the wailing, the musical instruments, and the use of *praeficae* in funerary lamentation.[427] In almost an act of desperation, an eastern Syrian synod as late as 576 C.E. specified that Christian parents "should no longer permit their daughters to learn worldly music" nor should they be allowed to sing or play instruments.[428] The bishops threatened "those who persisted in such mourning practices" with excommunication—exclusion from the church.[429]

Third, in terms of the Christian wake, is the subject of lamps and candles. Were women involved in arranging the lamps and candles round the funeral bier? Certainly 'someone' was placing candles at tombs in fourth century Spain, perhaps for all-night vigils, because the Council of Elvira "advised the faithful not to light candles at the tombs lest they disturb those [the ancient dead] sleeping beneath."[430] The council must not have affected practices in the Holy Land however, because the use of candles at tombs and vigils persisted. In fact, Jerome was forced to defend the use of "mountains of candles" for funerary wakes honoring the relics of the martyrs after a young presbyter, Vigilantius, who had witnessed the use of candles for himself in Bethlehem (ca. 407), questioned the

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427. See this thesis, chapter two, 30n79 for listing of the councils and synods in question.

428. Johannes Quasten, "The Liturgical Singing of Women in Christian Antiquity," *The Catholic Historical Review* 27.2 (Jul 1941): 160. Also the synod referred to here is the Synod of Mar Ezechiel (Syria) in 576 and in particular canon 37. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 182–83.

429. Quasten, "Liturgical Singing," 160. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 182–83.

430. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 110.

practice.[431] Just as Roman women performed the domestic duty of setting out candles and lamps in the home or at the cemetery for a wake, the same was likely true for early Christian women. Furthermore, if they arranged candles and lamps in their homes and at the cemeteries, they probably did the same in churches.

The Funeral Procession

The examination in chapter three of ‘common’ Roman funerary processions (for all but the poor and criminals) revealed the following: 1) funeral processions occurred in the daytime although they may have been held at night during and after the fourth century following a decree by the emperor Julian; 2) mourners commonly dressed in black; 3) formal lamentation continued all the way to the gravesite; 4) the cortège was organized outside the home of the deceased; 5) musical instruments were played in the Roman *pompa*; 6) elaborate aristocratic processions involved actors, dancers, mimes, and bearers of masks, trophies, tools, and so forth; 7) torches and lamps lighted the way, and 8) the deceased was carried on a bier by pallbearers.

Tertullian reminded Christians it was not appropriate to include instrumental music in the funerary procession transporting the deceased from the house to the gravesite.[432] The need for church authorities to stipulate such prohibitions again confirms that Christians retained many of the customs of the Roman funeral cortège (*pompa*). Perhaps because the negative approach (criticism and restriction) was slow in producing results, church authorities sometimes tried positive inducements to teach the laity. One

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431. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 116. See Jerome’s treatise, *Contra Vigilantium* (Against Vigilantius), in *Principle Works*, 6.4.

432. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 193.

lesson in proper Christian comportment is provided in Gregory of Nyssa's hagiography of his sister Macrina's funeral (mentioned earlier). Gregory stressed that Macrina's cortège was "proper" because it was organized by the bishop Araxius who arranged the participants "according to sex … the women marched with the virgins and the men went with the monks"; everyone maintained proper decorum singing psalms along the way even though "the crowd of both [lay]men and [lay]women who had gathered from the surrounding areas disturbed the psalm singing with its [pagan] wailing."[433] Moreover, as indicated in the discussion above, the lamentation led by the *praeficae*, was continued into Christian times; lamentation, as we recall, was complete sensory performance including sounds (the singing, wailing, and music), sights (the colors, gestures, dancing, loosened hair, scraped faces and arms, torches and candlelight), and smells (perfumes, spices, vegetation, and burning incense).[434] The third council of bishops in Toledo (Spain) in 589 specified that the body of a deceased Christian was to be carried to burial without funerary dirges (which were henceforth forbidden) and all processions for the dead were to be accompanied by the singing of psalms only.[435]

In other Christian accounts, the size of the funerary procession seems important, perhaps a way for church authority to idealize what was deemed "orthodox" and to elevate the status of the saintly person who had died. For instance, Paulinus of Milan

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433. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 33–34.44–45. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 194–95.

434. Cicero repeats the restrictions outlined by the *Twelve Tables*, which limited funeral mourners to ten flute players. Cicero, *De Legibus* 2. 23.59.

435. The psalms prescribed by the Third Council of Toledo for use in the procession to burial included Psalms 114, 115, 22, and 31; these were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 235. The prescription was not always consistent however, and varied by time and place, On the haphazard transmission of the church's prescribed psalmody, see the current chapter of this thesis, 137n493.

reports "the crowd present at the funeral of St. Ambrose was innumerable … people of every rank and sex and almost every age … Christians … but also Jews and pagans."[436] Jerome declares that, "the whole city gathered at [Fabiola's] obsequies. There was such a gathering that the streets, porticos and roofs were not able to hold all the spectators."[437]

According to Rush, Christian families used relatives and friends for pallbearers (as did the Romans) to transport the deceased to the gravesite; in addition, after the Peace of Constantine in the fourth century, poor members of the Christian community could count on help from the church coffers to pay for pallbearers and a grave.[438] Some of the *collegia* provided the same services.[439] Further, as mentioned above, charitable Christians were known to carry the bodies of martyrs and plague victims (complete strangers) to cemeteries for burial.[440]

Christians, like their Roman compatriots, commonly wore black (at least dark) mourning garments in the funeral procession. The Greco-Roman custom was to demonstrate grief by soiling one's clothing with ash and dirt (*vestes sordidae*), thus making them 'black.'[441] In addition, the ancient beliefs about afterlife under the earth

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436. Paulinus of Milan, *Vita S. Ambrosii*, edited by S. Kaniecka, Catholic University of America Patristic Studies, (Washington, DC. 1928), 48.16.92. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 195.

437. Jerome, *Principle* Works*: To Oceanus*, 77.11, and *To Eustochium*, 108.29. See also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 195–96.

438. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 203–04.

439. Bodel, "From *Columbaria*," 227–232.

440. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 205–06. Also see Eusebius, *Historia*, 7.16.1 and 7.22.9.

441. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 208-11. In Homer's *Iliad,* Achilles, upon the death of his dear friend Patroklos, "took dark dust with both his hands, defiled his comely face, and let the black ashes fall on his tunic. Then he laid himself in the dust and tore his hair." Homer, *Iliad*, 18.22–27. Further, the color designated as 'mourning-black' was the color of natural dark wool, the fabric used for mourning clothing, Rush, *Death and Burial*, 210.

("the region of darkness"), the gods of death and the underworld (Charon, Pluto, Jupiter), and the "hour of death" were all considered dark, sad, and mournful; hence, the symbolism of dark or black mourning garments.[442] Both Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, and Commodian, the Christian poet, denounced the wearing of black because it represented the mourning practices of pagans[443] but their denunciations indicate that Christians persisted with that part of the ritual. Basil and John Chrysostom also rejected the wearing of black, while Gregory of Nazianzus, using positive inducement, praised his mother for wearing white (the color of life and immortality) at the death of her son Caesarius.[444] Jerome in the fifth century also praised a certain Julian who only wore mourning garments for forty days after the death of his two daughters "and then clad himself in white robes to attend the [public] dedication service of a martyr's relics."[445]

Red and purple were colors commonly represented in the funeral procession.[446] For Greco-Romans, red was the color of blood sacrifice to the dead and could involve the slaughter of animals, (human sacrifice occurred in ancient Greece), the offering of cut hair, the celebration of gladiatorial games, self-mutilation (tearing of cheeks and arms), and later the draping of the deceased in a red or purple mantle, or the pouring of red wine

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442. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 209–12.

443. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 215–16. See also Cyprian, *De Mortalitate* 20.309 and Commodian, *Instructions of Commodianus*, translated by Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 4 of *ANF: Fathers of the Third Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 32.103.

444. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 216-18. Also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 7.15.773.

445. Jerome, *Principle Works: To Julian,* 118.4.

446. According to Kelly Olson, "The Appearance of the Young Roman Girl," in *Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture*, edited by J. C. Edmondson and Alison Keith (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), 151n30, the color purple was used by several cultures for its apotropaic qualities as symbolic for blood, the essence of life, and as protection against "evil forces."

over the corpse.[447] Jerome reports that Christians wore crowns of roses and violets (red/purple) for martyrs and in some cases roses and violets were scattered along the procession and at the gravesite.[448]

Ancient Roman funerals were held at night and so required the lighting of torches and candles; however, by the late republic funerals (except for the poor) took place in the daytime but retained the use of torches and candles.[449] Because of their association with the pagan cult of the dead, the feasts of the Roman gods, and the cult of the emperor, the use of torches was forbidden by the bishops as early as 200 C.E. in Rome and Africa.[450] As mentioned above, the Council of Elvira in Spain (ca. 306) banned lighting candles in any cemetery during the day "because the spirits of the deceased are not to be disturbed."[451] Yet in Carthage the body of the bishop Cyprian was carried to the cemetery accompanied with "torches and tapers."[452] This illustrates the variation in practices throughout the empire. For instance, also escorted to their places of burial by lights and candles were a number of highly revered saints and clergy: Macrina and Simeon Stylites

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447. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 212–14. Sacrifice for the dead "to appease the spirits of the dead and the gods of the dead" (the *Manes*) is mentioned also in Homer's *Iliad* (at Patroklos' death). Also Suetonius, *Divus Augustus (Lives of the Caesars)*, translated by J. C. Rolfe, vol. 1, LCL 31 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 169.

448. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 220. Also Jerome, *Principle Works: To Pammachius*, 66.5.

449. Reference to this practice is found in Vergil, Festus, Martial, and Ovid as well as Servius, Varro, Propertius, Tacitus, Seneca, Calpernicus Flaccus, and Suetonius; the torches and lamps were important in the feasts of the gods and the emperor and used for the cult of the dead. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 221–22.

450. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 223–24.

451. For canon 34 of Council of Elvira, in Granada ca. 309, see *SC*, 2.11, which reads: "Candles are not to be burned in a cemetery during the day. This practice is related to paganism and is harmful to Christians. Those who do this are to be denied the communion of the church." Additionally, Rush, *Death and Burial*, 225.

452. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 226.

(Antioch), John Chrysostom (Constantinople), Paula (Bethlehem), and Peter the Iberian (Gaza), among others.[453]

As far as the *pompae* of ordinary middle-class Christian families, these tended to follow Roman custom; an example appears in a piece of graffiti. Scrawled in the cemetery of St. Catherine at Chiusi (Italy) from the third century is a message to say that the family of a certain Fonteia Concordia "led her funeral procession bearing candles"; the same family used candles again in the cortège for Fonteia's husband, Stenius Gaudentius.[454]

Women and the Funeral Procession

Roman-Christian women continued to perform the funeral laments for the deceased in the funeral cortège. Gail Holst-Warhaft discusses how women's mourning was suppressed by the church, first through " the rhetoric of condemnation" (Basil, Chrysostom, Augustine), and then by "appropriation of the forms of lament by another literary tradition," psalms and hymns, "sung by choirs of men and often by women who had taken holy orders" (virgins, widows).[455] Tertullian condemned *praeficae* who led the women in mourning; he also railed against the use of actors, mimes, and buffoons in processions; these, Tertullian associated with "the stage and circus which are an abomination on account of their vice."[456] However, Christian women persisted with the singing of funeral dirges, and continued to weep and wail at funerals well into the sixth

453. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 227.

454. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 226.

455. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, 171.

456. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 10.57.

century, certainly in Spain, as indicated in the section above.[457] The Council of Toledo imposed a law against "the abuses" of the "popular practice of singing funeral dirges"—a direct criticism of women's role in lamentation—and decreed that the dirges were to be substituted for psalms and hymns."[458] Again, the hermeneutic of suspicion presumes the survival of women's funerary lament (at least in Spain) late into the sixth century.

Several times this study has mentioned that lamentation involves song, dance, and ritual movement—a total "performance." MacMullen argues that for Romans the combined media of song, dance, and movement had always been "a social practice," and more importantly, "the conduct of religion."[459] Romans, it seems, had a basic need for artistic performance and 'make-believe' (engagement with media/material culture), which was satisfied through participation in song and dance, only available for ordinary people in times of religiosity such as funerals where lamentation, processions, ceremonies at the gravesite, burial, and banquets for the dead occurred.[460] Perhaps precisely because of these basic social and religious needs, the women of Christian families stubbornly maintained 'performed' lamentation. It was one way of generating "experiences, forms of shared consciousness" and community, thus allowing "people to

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457. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 234–35.

458. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 234–35.

459. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 102. Also Frankfurter, *Roman Egypt*, 55–56. In the area of performance and media studies, see David Morgan, "Introduction," in *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*, edited by David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–19.

460. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 71. Obviously, élite Romans were able to access other forms of 'performance' at the theatre, at aristocratic symposia (featuring elaborate poetry, prose), and in collections of art and sculpture.

assemble meanings that articulate and extend their relations to one another."[461] That is, women's lamentation 'mediated' Christian identity.[462]

Burial/Disposal of the Body

A recap of the common rituals surrounding the Roman burial is itemized as follows: 1) the burial occurred outside the city boundaries in nearly all cases;[463] 2) a sacrifice was made on a new gravesite; 3) the name of the dead was invoked for the last time (the *vale* or *anáklesis*); 4) the funeral oration was given followed by the *nenia* accompanied by the flute (if the *patron* could afford it); 5) the body was laid in the grave or placed on a pyre and a small amount of earth was thrown on it; 6) grave gifts were placed with the corpse; 7) some *collegia* supported the burial of members and also their families, and 8) the family unit remained the primary caretaker of the dead despite the many changes in burial fashion.

As demonstrated in chapter three, private burial sites in the vicinity of the city of Rome fell under the jurisdiction of *sacra publica*, and were considered as *locus religiosus* to be protected by law; first, this was because a corpse was present,[464] and second,

461. Morgan, "Introduction," 7.

462. Morgan, "Introduction," 16. New ideas in media studies may be relevant to the study of ancient funerary lament. For example, if lamentation combined singing, poetry, wailing, weeping, and musical instrumentation, how did the resultant 'media' create religiosity for early Christians in the funerary context? Perhaps ancient funerary lamentation is valid data in the study of "how religion is embodied and felt by believers, becoming a powerful form of sensation and thereby materializing the study of mediated communities." Morgan, "Introduction," 16.

463. As pointed out by John R. Patterson, "On the Margins of the City of Rome," in Death and Disease in the Ancient City, edited by Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall ((New York: Routledge, 2000), 92, the only exceptions were apparently a "handful of families, such as those of P. Valerius Publicola … and C. Fabricuius Luscinus … had the right to be buried inside the city, though in the imperial period this seems to have been little exercised; and Trajan was buried a the foot of his column" inside Rome in 117 C.E.

464. *Digest of Justinian*, translated by Charles H. Monro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904, repr. in eBook, 2008), 1.6.4, 40–41 and 2.422. http://www.archive.org/stream/

because of “the wider associations of contact with divinity.”[465] Therefore due to “their religious nature, the sale, construction, and repair of tombs were regulated by the pontiffs, even well into the Constantinian era, as late as 385.”[466] Roman-Christian families continued to bury their dead in family tombs and cemeteries and some Christian élites provided patronage to *collegia* known to handle the burial of members and their families.[467] There will be more about patronage of burial memorials later.

While it has been acknowledged there was no definitive ‘Christian’ burial liturgy until the time of Charlemagne, the philosophy/theology of what would eventually constitute the Christian burial liturgy appeared in the so-called Roman *ordo defunctorum* of the fourth and fifth centuries.[468] The *ordo defunctorum* defined the deceased Christian as follows. Each person is

> a totality, body and soul, on the verge of dissolution into its constituent parts … at the moment of death, the body becomes separated out as an object different from the soul. Attention settles first on the soul in its passage to the other world [hence the need for *viaticum*]. Then the focus turns to the body, its transition from the deathbed to the grave. But the

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digestofjustinia025178mbp#page/n75/mode/2up/search/burial (accessed July 28, 2011). *Digest of Justinian*, 2.244.

465. Carolyn Osiek, “Roman and Christian Burial Practices and the Patronage of Women,” in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, edited by L. Brink and D. Green (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 246–47. Also, Johnson, “Pagan-Christian,” 39.

466. Osiek, “Roman and Christian,” 246–47. Also see *Digest of Justinian*, 1.6.4, 40–41.

467. Bodel, “*Columbaria* to Catacombs,” 227–232. According to Mark J. Johnson, “Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5.1 (1997): 41, “in the case of family or hereditary tombs, a person could not be excluded from burial on the basis of his religious beliefs, provided he were a co-owner. Such exclusion had to occur before the person became a co-owner. Therefore, the owners of a tomb or catacomb could sell burial spaces to anyone, irrespective of the buyer’s religious beliefs.”

468. Paxton describes the Roman *ordo defunctorum* as the hypothetical conglomerate of death rituals based on “the antique understanding of a Christian death” devised during the fourth and fifth centuries. The attitude of the *ordo* was “confidence in salvation and joy of the passage of a Christian soul to the next world.” Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 43–45.

> treatment of the body mirrors the state of the soul. The body that is washed and reclothed, carried in procession, and incorporated in the earth is a symbol of the soul that is purified, transformed, and incorporated in the other world. This symbolic mirroring implies a belief in an active afterlife for the soul, at least until its arrival among the blessed in the place of repose.[469]

Despite the doctrine surrounding death however, the appeals of church officials for Christian families to seek out the clergy for comfort and consolation in times of bereavement, failed. Generally, in the early Christian period, the laity (the ordinary "rabble," or the "ninety-five percent of Christianity" described by MacMullen)[470] chose to rely on family initiative, ancient funerary traditions, the culture of ancestor worship, the cult of the dead, and the domestic ritual specialization of women.[471] It took a long time for the domestic religiosity of the family to shift toward a central religion, the church. For instance, it was not until the seventh century that many Christian families began to invite a clergyman to attend a burial and anoint the deceased before interment.[472] In one case, the archbishop Theodore of Canterbury devised a "penitential" rite for use should a private family invite his attendance at the cemetery; it called for the pouring of blessed oil over the corpse laid in the grave.[473] Notably, this ritual was reminiscent of the Greco-Roman practice of pouring wine over the grave. Theodore's penitential rite also

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469. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 44.

470. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 107–11.

471. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 22. While MacMullen has observed that 95% of the people focused on familial piety, my observation (and thesis) is that familial piety or domestic religiosity is an area of significant responsibility for the women of the household in particular.

472. Rowell, *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, 30.

473. Two other burial liturgies (formulated during seventh to ninth centuries) repeat this rite of anointing the dead in the grave, the Penitential of Egbert of York, and the Penitential of Halitgar of Cambrai. Rowell, *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, 30.

mimicked the Roman anointing of the dead in the home, practiced for centuries, but with a Christian element added—the blessing of the oil (*chrism)*. The processes of dynamic discourse between laity and clergy, brought about through negotiation, gradually allowed Christian families to accept the clergy's blessings on the *unction* for burial.

Did Christians bury their dead separately from pagans? This question has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. The work of Mark J. Johnson shows quite decidedly that Christian burials were mixed with pagan burials in the Roman world as late as the sixth century. Johnson argues that church regulations "were by no means standard but in a state of evolution … there is not even the mention of a need to bless or sanctify the place of burial" until Gregory of Tours addresses it in his writings in 587.[474] Furthermore, Christian cemeteries "developed from pagan burial areas" as shown in the archaeological evidence from North Africa, Sicily, North Britain, and Naples where Christians simply reused or remodeled pagan tombs located outside the city boundaries.[475] Johnson argues that under Roman law "there was no reason why pagans and Christians could not share the same tomb."[476] However, there were differences in burial style in the

474. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 37–48. Gregory of Tours, in writing about the death of the abbess of Poitiers, Radegunde, tells how the nuns of the abbey expected a bishop's blessing of Radegunde's gravesite before she was laid to rest. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 49.

475. Johnson observes that previously held notions among archaeologists about 'reading' the difference between pagan and Christian tombs are finally being abandoned; for instance, the depiction of the 'fish' is not automatically 'Christian' nor is an indication of date of death assumed the mark of Christian burial. On the other hand, the "dedication" *Dies Manibus Sacrum* (DMS) on a gravesite is no longer "assumed to be pagan" and may equally denote Christian burial. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 50. For further discussion on Christians and pagans buried together, see William H. C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1996), 163, 345, 370. Regarding the location of gravesites and tombs, from the time of the *Twelve Tables* ca. 450 B.C.E., burials had always occurred outside the city precincts; to solidify the law, ca. 381 Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius repeated the legislation, to which all Romans, pagans, and Christians were bound. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 40.

476. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 40.

early years. From the beginning, Christians opted for inhumation (also a Jewish custom) while Romans were using either cremation or inhumation as a burial method; in the second century, a shift occurred whereby aristocratic Romans (and wealthy Christians) began to favor Greek-styled sarcophagi for inhumation so that by the fifth century cremation had become rare indeed.[477] Mark J. Johnson argues that Christian cemeteries grew from existing pagan burial sites (where the Christian dead mingled with the pagan dead), a practice that endured well into the fourth century.[478] During all this time the church issued "no clear, universal injunctions against burial with pagans"; in fact it was not until 785 at the Council of Paderborn in Saxony that the bishops legislated that "members of the Church [were] to be buried in the cemeteries of the churches and not in 'pagan mounds'."[479] This decree in the late eighth century confirms a policy of "non-interference by the Church in private burials" during late antiquity.[480]

In terms of burial obsequies at the gravesite, Christians in late antiquity appear to have retained many of the Greco-Roman traditions. Regarding the oration/eulogy over the deceased prior to the laying in the tomb, one of the earliest Christian eulogies is found

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477. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 236–39. Minucius Felix, Pliny, and Cicero maintained that earth burial was the oldest Roman method of burial before cremation came into vogue. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 11.178. Pliny, the Elder, *Naturalis Historia,* 277, and, Cicero, *De Legibus II*, 441. In addition, an excellent secondary source is Bodel, "*Columbaria* to Catacombs,"181. According to Bodel, some scholars have suggested that Christians influenced the change from cremation to inhumation; however, argues Bodel, "no plausible causal relationship between the [timing of the] two has ever been found," "*Columbaria* to Catacombs," 181. Arthur Darby Nock summarizes the scholarly conjectures about the shift from cremation to inhumation. He suggests the desire for ostentatious display using expensive sarcophagi in the Greek tradition, the high cost of fuel/wood for funeral pyres, the idea of 'fashion' among the rich, or a change in the understanding of the afterlife were among the likely explanations. Nock, "Cremation," 321–359. See Johnson's hypothesis in "Pagan-Christian Burial,"45 regarding the demise of cremation in the Roman world by the fifth century.

478. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial," 50.

479. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial,“ 44.

480. Johnson, ”Pagan-Christian Burial," 44.

in the apocryphal *Acts of John* (mid-second century) when John spoke to "the brethren" gathered for the burial of Drusiana.[481] In the fourth and fifth centuries there were famous orations by the bishops—Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose—taking "the form of pagan oratory, for the people of that time looked upon everything as inferior which was not preached in the popular style of the times."[482] This would suggest there was an attempt by the bishops to appropriate the Greco-Roman style of funerary oration in order to appeal to as many Roman-Christians as possible.[483] Notably, orations were the duty of men since the *laudatio funebris* occurred in public. Male performance is illustrated in the example of Ambrose's eulogy for his brother Satyrus inside the church[484]; Ambrose also eulogized two of the emperors, Valentinian (d. 392) and Theodocius I (d. 395).[485] Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus gave an oration at the funeral of his younger brother Caesarius in 368, and another at his father's funeral in 374.[486]

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481. *Acts of John*, 66–69, in James, *Apocryphal New Testament,* 244–45. According to James, John's eulogy or *laudatio funebris* for Drusiana, rather than the usual praise of her life was "more of the nature of a sermon … the occasion for an instruction in Christian doctrine" about life after death. Also Rush, *Death and Burial*, 262–64.

482. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 265–66, 268-69. Another view of the eulogy as a rhetorical device is presented by Paul F. Burke, Jr. who explains the Roman eulogy as a blending of past, present, and future to praise the deeds of all ancestors, linking the "remote past of the family with the present"; it also highlights "the Roman concern of ancestry, family, and lines of descent (genealogy)" even to the point of including the entire historical line of "Romans." P. F. Burke, Jr., "Roman Rites for the Dead and *Aeneid* 6," *The Classical Journal* 74.3 (Feb–Mar 1979): 223–27.

483. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 261–62. Funeral oratory originated with the Romans but the Greeks refined the skills of speech and rhetoric by influencing both the theory and the laws governing funeral oration; it seemed prudent and practical for the early Christians to incorporate the *laudatio funebris* into their funerary practices. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 265–67.

484. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 270–71. See Ambrose, *De Obitu Satyri*, 2.2.174.

485. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 271–73.

486. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 267–68. Also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, 18.1–43 (*Oration on the Death of His Father*). For discussion of the funeral "*encomium*" (oration preached on an anniversary of death) for Gregory's sister, Gorgonia (d. 370), see 8.1–23 (*On His Sister Gorgonia*), and for

Gregory of Nyssa preached three funeral orations—one for the bishop Meletius (d. 381), a second for the princess Pulcheria (d. 385), and a third for the Empress Flacilla (d. 385)—each was given not the day of the funeral, but on the thirtieth day anniversary of death.[487] Supposedly Christian families imitated the practices of the clergy in continuing the Greco-Roman practices, and had male kinsfolk give the funerary orations for their own "ordinary dead."

Roman burial rituals also included the presentation of domestic gifts placed in the grave/sarcophagus with the deceased as sustenance in the afterlife. Is there evidence that the giving of gifts continued at Christian burials? From the sermons of John Chrysostom and the hermeneutic of suspicion, we learn that the practice of grave gifting continued into Christianity. When Chrysostom tells his congregation "the dead no longer have need of such things" (lighted candles, food, clothing) it confirms that gifting occurred.[488] Furthermore, artifacts have come to light in excavations in Gaul where aristocratic Frankish Christians buried "articles of personal apparel and domestic use" in the graves with their deceased family members; the wealthy often "added … weapons and treasure that were the signs of their status in life."[489] Notably, church authorities in Gaul did not

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the preaching of an *encomium* for his brother, Basil, some two years after Basil died in 379, see 43.1–82 (*Funeral Oration on the Great S. Basil).*

487. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 269–70. The reason is not clear for the delivery of the orations on the thirtieth day instead of on the actual day of burial, but Rush hypothesizes that there may have been some intent among the bishops to use funeral anniversaries to teach Christians about the exemplary life; for example, Gregory of Nyssa's emphasis was to highlight the life of his brother Basil, whom Gregory believed to be a saint. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 268–69.

488. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 32. See also Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*: 62.4, 63.1, 85.5, 85.6, 86.1 and *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*: 4.7,4.8, 31.4.

489. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 62.

object to this custom; hence, "the Christian Frankish kings were buried thus in church graves and the practice survived throughout the seventh century."[490]

As noted earlier, the bishops could not abide the singing of laments during funeral activity—not during the procession to the grave and not at the burial. Because there is repeated critical mention of the *praeficae* in the homilies, and because the *praeficae* were the ones designated to sing the *nenia* (song of mourning) following the *laudatio funebris* at the burial,[491] we must suppose that the *nenia* was a custom that also prevailed into the Christian era (at least until the time of John Chrysostom, late in the fourth century). But, as referred to earlier, the Church Fathers objected to these Greco-Roman forms of lamentation and encouraged a different 'Christian' response to death—biblical psalms to oppose Roman laments.[492] According to Paxton, "Christian writers repeatedly emphasized the difference between the psalms of joy sung at their funerals and the sad dirges and lamentations that accompanied the burial of pagans … the psalms chosen [were] songs of faith triumphant and confidence in salvation."[493] Yet, while church officials opposed the

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490. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 62.

491. The *nenia* was sung by the female *praeficae*, but accompanied by flute/pipe music; it is not clear who the musician might be—male or female (or perhaps it did not matter). According to Dutsch, the function of the *nenia* was to assist both the deceased and the bereaved in "crossing boundaries," and especially to convince the deceased that he/she was no longer alive. Dutsch, "*Nenia*," 259, 261. Cicero attests that the *nenia* "complemented" the *laudatio funebris*, was sung/played *after* the eulogy, and was the *last* rite performed at the burial/disposition. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.61–62.

492. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 29–31.

493. As Paxton points out, it took some time for the church to harmonize its psalmody for a funeral liturgy. The fourth century the body of Church Orders known as the *Apostolic Constitutions* mentioned Psalm 114 for burial rites; John Chrysostom urged Christians to sing songs of joy like Psalms 114 and 22 at funerals; the 'Roman-Christian' orders/rituals (the so-called *ordo defunctorum* that developed between the fourth and sixth centuries), which were "the earliest Latin ritual for death and burial" prescribed Psalms 113, 32, and 114 for vigils of the martyrs. By late sixth century, canon 22 of the Council of Toledo (598) stipulated Psalms 114, 115, 22, and 31 (see current thesis 124n435) as the appropriate and "initial response to death." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 43. See also Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, translated by Boniface Ramsey (Washington, DC, 1983), 161–

use of mourning dirges, Ambrose himself performed the *Vale* (calling/chanting the name of his deceased brother in final farewell) before the entire Christian assembly at the church service.[494] Rush argues this may not have been typical Christian behavior because many early Christians adopted the use of "farewell inscriptions" (*Vivas*) that exclaimed hope to the departed for a "true life for the soul" and "joy in the peace of Christ."[495]

Women and the Burial/Disposal of the Body

As mentioned above, wealthy Roman householders often owned tombs for the family and sometimes purchased cemeteries for *collegia*. Several Roman-Christian women's names can be found among those connected to "principal Christian burial places" such as the catacombs named after the following women: Priscilla, Domitilla, Lucina, Commodilla, Thecla, Felicitas, Agnes, and many others.[496] Of course, many patrons were also male benefactors: Sebasian, Novatian, Callistus, Pamphilus, and others.[497]After the second century when the prices for land surrounding Rome increased dramatically, patrons "went underground below their own property" for additional burial space.[498] The growth in the cult of the martyrs during the fourth century called for more burials *ad sanctos* (next to or near the saint); this caused "many previously independent

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63, 169. Notably, while there was agreement by the bishops that psalms should replace lamentation at funerals, there was some confusion/disagreement about specific psalms, which shows the evolving process of Christianity.

494. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 255. Also see Ambrose, *De Obitu Satyri*, FP 15, 78.

495. Other examples of the *Vivas* in Christian inscriptions include: "Live in Christ" and "May you have perpetual refreshment in the peace of God." Rush, *Death and Burial*, 256–57.

496. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 255.

497. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 255.

498. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 255–56.

private burial complexes [to become] joined underground," creating by the late fourth and early fifth centuries "vast labyrinths that the major Christian catacombs are today" not only in Rome, but also in Malta, North Africa, Syracuse, and elsewhere.[499]

Aristocratic Christian women (often widows) were sometimes patrons of *collegia tenuiorum* (associations of non-élites/freeborn poor), the 'burial societies' that assured "a decent burial of deceased members"; the associations held monthly meals where "a collection was taken up for the common chest."[500] For example, in the catacomb of the patroness Domitilla (city of Rome), one section "apparently belonged to a *collegium* of *mensores,* an association responsible for procurement and distribution of the regular dole of grain to the populace of Rome."[501] Further, the catacomb of Commodilla (in Rome) reveals the gravesite of a wealthy woman patron, the widow Turtura, in a small underground basilica of the martyrs Adauctus and Felix; apparently, Turtura was "important enough to be immortalized" in a *fresco* together with the two martyrs on either side of the Virgin and Child.[502] Basilicas will be discussed in more detail later.

As mentioned above, women's lamentation continued as part of Christian burial rites. Margaret Alexiou explains that once the funeral procession reached the gravesite and the laments (or psalm singing) had concluded, "there was a fresh outbreak of uncontrolled grief" (lament) by the women as the last greeting (the *vale*) was given.[503]

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499. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 256.

500. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 255.

501. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 267.

502. Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 268.

503. The literature refers to the Greek *aspasmós* (greeting) and *teleutaîos aspasmós* (final greeting) of the church; a distinction is made between the "more formal *aspasmós* of church tradition,"

According to Alexiou the last greeting was like "the last tear" and, like the "stretching out of the right hand over the bier ... it was essential for the peace of mind of the dead as well as of the next of kin."[504] Moreover, when the body of the deceased was laid in the grave to be covered with earth, "once more the spontaneous lamentation of the people [the women] conflicted with the more formal *aspasmós* [psalm-singing] of church tradition."[505] Here is Gregory of Nyssa's hagiography about his sister Macrina:

> But our prayer caused people to start crying. When there was a pause in the singing of the psalms, the women turned to look at that saintly face. At that moment our parents' tomb (in which Macrina was to be buried) was being opened and some woman cried out desperately that we would never see that divine face again. Then the rest of the women joined her in crying out in the same way, and a wild confusion broke out, disrupting the ordered and sacred character of the psalm singing, as everyone echoed the women's laments. We signaled to them to be quiet but it was hard to get them to do so.[506]

Indeed, domestic religiosity and family tradition, as illustrated by women's lament performance continued to rouse the ire of the bishops. As an alternative therefore, Romanos, the melodist and hymnographer of Byzantine fame, developed the *kontákion, Mary at the Cross*—a dramatic poetic dialogue sung as a hymn to portray the Virgin lamenting over her dead son, Jesus; it was intended for performance at Christian burials.[507] Romanos' *kontákion* was similar in some ways to the *Stabat Mater* of

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perhaps meaning the "sacred chanting" of psalms, while the *teleutaîos aspasmós* may be more similar to the Roman *vale* known as the "final farewell." Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 31.

504. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 31.

505. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 31, 62.

506. Gregory of Nyssa, *Macrina*, 34.45.

507. Alexiou explains that the sources of the *kontákion* are taken from the ancient Greek tragedies including the seven plays of Euripides, as well as from Aeschylus and Lykophron; in addition, sections of the Old and New Testaments and the apocryphal acts and gospels are incorporated into the Virgin's lament. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 62, 64–65.

"medieval Latin tradition, where great emphasis was given to the Virgin's patience and fortitude."[508] However, Alexiou argues that "no such lesson can be drawn from the Greek Virgin" depicted in the *kontákion* because the way Romano wrote the piece, the Virgin's grief "is so violent that she has to be pushed aside" in the drama.[509] Consequently, it may be no surprise that Romano's creation became very popular; it addressed the laity's continuing need for women's lamentation performed for the deceased through the emotion of the bereaved.

This thesis has argued in previous sections that women likely provided or organized many of the grave gifts buried with the deceased because the gifts were arguably produced in the home; further, women would be well represented as 'presenters' of the gifts. Jerome relates that Christians—we might presume women—scattered roses and violets on the graves of deceased relatives and saints (red and purple symbolized the blood shed by the martyrs for Christ).[510] It was not until the "penetration of Irish monasticism" and the example of Gertrude, the daughter of Pippin I, whose change in practice brought more austerity to Christian burials; by the eighth century lavish grave goods in the tombs of the Franks had been discontinued.[511]

It seems Roman-Christian fears of ritual pollution from contact with the dead may have persisted until the fourth century. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (written around 380

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508. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 62–65.

509. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 62–65.

510. Rush, *Death and Burial*, 220. Also Jerome, *Principle Works: To Eustochium*, 108.31 (hanging votives from cords of gold), and *To Pammachius*, 66.5 (scattering roses and violets on the grave). Sadly, I have been unable to find any material culture to support the practice of scattering flowers; indeed, such a find would provide substance for a future dissertation.

511. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 62–63.

C.E. in Syria) admonished those Christians still following "the ritual prescriptions of Judaism," or Greco-Roman (pagan) traditions regarding death-pollution; instead, Christians were instructed "not to regard contact with a dead body as something which in any way defiles them" and to assist even in the burial of the poor, the diseased, and total strangers.[512]

Perhaps because Roman women were 'comfortable' in handling the bodies of the dead as part of their *pietas* (duties to the family), they were attracted to the care of the 'holy dead.' Arguably, Christian women embraced the acquisition of martyr-relics as a duty to both their own family and eventually to the larger Christian community (church family). Hagiographies detail how Pompeiana obtained the body of Maximilianus in 295 and Asclepia erected a shrine to the martyr, Anastasius in 304.[513] By adopting a martyr's body or relics as part of her own family, Christian women like Pompeiana and Asclepia could request favors (heaven) for self and kin through the saint's intercession to God. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect the subject of ritual pollution from death faded as the cult of the saints expanded beyond the fourth century. According to Brown, the handling of dead bodies quickly lost much of its taboo as the remains of martyred saints were dug up, dismembered, and translated to shrines and *martyriums* where the relics were touched and kissed by devoted Christians.[514] Women, including Melania, Eudocia and Pompeiana,

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512. Rowell, *Christian Burial*, 25. The Jewish and pagan prescriptions pertaining to death-pollution sharply separated the living from the dead. See Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 25 and Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 5–6. Furthermore, it was important to the church that all Christians care for the dead—family or stranger—"without reservation." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 127.

513. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 33. Also *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Musurillo, especially *S. Maximilani*, 3–4.248.

514. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 4, Brown suggests further that the translation of relics (for example, from the Holy Land to other Christian communities in the Mediterranean region) was actually the

initiated the acquisition, translation, and burial of the sacred bones and relics and were instrumental in the patronage of the martyr-shrines and *martyriums*—a subject to be addressed in greater detail in the sections to follow.[515]

Commemoration of the Dead

The cult of the dead required that Romans be assured of their own commemoration and care after death.[516] This involved: 1) purification rites following the burial; 2) festivities on the ninth-day-after-burial; 3) regular private funerary banquets; 4) public/civic commemoration days celebrated by Roman families for all deceased ancestors; 5) dining with the dead in the cemeteries; 6) additional visits to the grave by family members who would bring offerings of comfort, and 7) memorial grave-markers or monuments to ensure lasting memory of the departed. The task in this section is to explore similarities and differences between Roman and Christian practices of commemoration in late antiquity.

First in the matter of purification, chapter three explained that Roman families used the purification rite (*suffitio*) upon returning home after a funeral; it involved sprinkling the kinsfolk with water, washing household objects, bathing, sweeping the

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'thread' connecting practices of patronage, gift-giving, and alliances between the laity and élite clergy during the fourth and fifth centuries, which led inevitably to pilgrimage (economics), further translations, and politics in the middle ages. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 89–90. Arguably, because of their position in the cult of the saints, women would have been integral in creating these lay-clerical liaisons.

515. For example ca. 295 in North Africa "the gentlewoman Pompeiana … appropriate[d] the body of the young martyr Maximilianus …[and] brought it to Carthage. There she buried it at the foot of a hill near the governor's palace next to the body of the martyr Cyprian" and thirteen days later when she herself died, her remains were buried next to the two martyred saints in a place of great advantage for her own salvation, first as the patron of the shrine and subsequently as the client of the two holy saints." Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 33–34. Regarding Melania the Younger and the Empress Eudocia, see E. A. Clark, "Claims on the Bones," 141–56.
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516. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 61–62.

house clean, and making a sacrifice at the family shrine.[517] However, as indicated above, concern about death-pollution became minimized by the fourth century with the rise of the cult of the martyrs/relics.[518] This may explain why little evidence exists about what and whether purification rites took place in late-antique Christian homes following death. That being said, two so-called 'purification rites' did emerge in two ninth century Christian *sacramentaries*—one written ca. 815–45 at the church of St. Eligius of Noyon (the St. Eligius *sacramentary*) and the other, written at the monastery of Corbie in northern France ca. 853 (the Rodradus *sacramentary*).[519] These *sacramentaries* (books of rituals including formalized prayers, procedures, and rites) call for "purification of the home" accomplished with the sprinkling of blessed water throughout the premises "to the accompaniment of an antiphon and a prayer."[520] It is entirely possible that these later rituals developed to remove the 'pollution' of sinfulness (in the Christian sense) and were therefore related more to penance; additionally, purification rites in the eighth and ninth centuries may have been used to remove the "ritual impurity" of sickness rather than the idea of (pagan) ritual pollution attributed to contact with a corpse.[521]

Second was the ninth-day-after-burial celebrations or *cena novendialis*. The Roman rites included a repetition of the *suffitio*, a sacrifice to the dead in the form of

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517. The Roman rites of purification are described in Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 50.

518. On death-pollution, see *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 22.1–4.

519. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 149.

520. These purification rites (washing away of the soul's impurity) were used at a priest's visit to the sick person's home; the priest anointed the sick person and imparted a benediction or laying-on of hands. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 150–51.

521. According to Paxton, both water and oil were used extensively as purifying agents. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 28.

wine poured over the grave, and a memorial banquet (*refrigerium*) celebrated by the entire family also at the gravesite. Robin M. Jensen notes that, “visual and epigraphic artifacts as well as textual evidence” provide affirmation that “converts to the Christian religion” maintained the practice of funerary meals.[522] For instance, wall paintings in the Christian catacombs of Rome, sculpted reliefs on Christian sarcophagi, and graffiti under S. Sebastiano “demonstrate that Christians continued to share the traditional meals with the dead.”[523] Christian practice also followed the Roman calendar—banquet memorials were held on the third, ninth, and thirtieth day after death, at one year, and annually thereafter, as well as on the communal/civic dates for *Parentalia*, *Rosalia*, *Feralia*, and so forth.[524] However, the bishops attempted to ‘Christianize’ the Roman festivities. Augustine’s sermons (410–412), for example, confirm that Christians remained attached to the celebration of the *Parentalia* and Augustine encouraged his congregation to modify the feast day by availing themselves of the opportunity “to commemorate their dead with the eucharist on their tombs.”[525] Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus advocated “the cult of the martyrs as a Christian version of the cult of the dead” and left the celebrations (minus

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522. Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 107.

523. Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 123.

524. For discussion of the Christian funerary celebrations that varied by region and were held on the third, seventh or ninth, thirtieth or fortieth day after burial/death, see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 134–37 and MacMullen, *Second Church*, 77.

525. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 151. For further accounts of toleration of the memorial feasts of the dead by the clergy, see Jensen, “Dining with the Dead,” 122–123.Tertullian confirms the family’s practice of celebrating with the deceased by his comments, “While reclining at a sumptuous funeral banquet, no one would dare to speak ill of the dead, since they are thought to be … present at the party.” Tertullian, *The Soul’s Testimony*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, vol. 3 of *ANF* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867), 4.4–5.

the profanity, of which he strongly disapproved) up to the laity to honor the martyred saints.[526]

Third, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the point of the Roman *refrigerium* was the sharing between the living and the dead. Food and libation were prepared and served from a table or grave-top (*mensa*); then by means of pipes and holes from the surface, portions of the feast were dispensed to the ashes and bones in the grave or sarcophagus, thus ensuring that the spirit of the deceased participated in the celebration.[527] Of particular interest for this study are the tombs of Christian families bearing those same dining modifications for feeding the dead (libations tubes, draining holes in the *mensae*, water wells, stone couches/chairs, and so forth).[528] MacMullen maintains that *mensae* eventually became the altars in Christian churches.[529] Augustine was careful to distinguish between the two terms, *mensa* (a dining table) and *altare* (a place of sacrifice); for example, the *Mensa Cypriani*—the martyr's shrine for Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (d. 258)—was not the place where Cyprian dined but rather the place where he

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526. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 151–52.

527. Jensen observes that *mensae* in cemeteries have been found everywhere in the Roman world including Italy, Africa, Dalmatia, Spain, Germany, and in Malta's catacombs; often family tombs were associated with or constructed in conjunction with martyr-shrines as part of a basilica "built primarily to house funeral banquets and private memorial services" Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 118–26. Regarding the building of basilicas for the purpose of funeral meals, see MacMullen, *Second Church*, 24–25. MacMullen also explains that the well in the cemetery or basilica was used not only for cleanup after the feasting but also to chill and to dilute the wine used in the celebrations. *Second Church*, 55. Further, the sarcophagus of St. Paul is housed in the grand basilica (San Paolo) built by Constantine in the suburbs of Rome; notably, the cover (*mensa*) of the sarcophagus of St. Paul has a libation-hole for the sharing of wine between the living and the dead. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 85.

528. Among the Christian and non-Christian burials (including martyrs) discovered by archaeologists are those bearing *mensae* for feast preparation over the tomb (along with holes for sharing libations and communion with the dead). These are located at Sirmium, Iader, Thebes, Corinth, Larissa, Salona, Epesus, Tanagra, Constantinople, and Marusinac and include a *mensa* above the crypt of St. Demeter at Thessalonica. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 45–49.

529. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 50.

died for Christ.[530] However, as MacMullen points out, both the eucharist at the altar and a feast at the *mensa* could in practice occur simultaneously: "Whatever the liturgy for saints' days, the same altar-*mensa* would be used for the Eucharist and *refrigeria*"; furthermore, celebrating the eucharist at the tombs of the martyrs had been approved by Pope Felix, (269-274).[531]

Roman-Christians therefore continued their banquets or outdoor picnics for the dead in the cemeteries, which, in Roman fashion, extended late into the night, sometimes becoming loud riotous parties with music, dancing and singing, excessive eating and drinking, and sexual impropriety.[532] Patristic writings from Tertullian to Chrysostom and Augustine condemn the debauchery at these feasts, claiming that the festivities are "associated with idolatry and the feasts of the pagan gods"; they cite from 1 Cor 10.21 and assert that "offering funeral oblations or partaking in what was offered at the banquet is akin to sitting down at the table of the demons."[533] According to the bishops, Christians should avoid involvement in the cult of the dead and not attend funerary banquets or if they must (in order to satisfy "family or social obligation"), then they should do so passively.[534] Zeno, the bishop of Verona (ca. 350–380) repeated the warning.[535] Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia (ca. 390–410) condemned funerary meals as "a form of

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530. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 137–38.

531. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 168 n. 46. Also J. H. Srawley, *The Early History of the Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 134. See also Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 10.

532. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 29–30.

533. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 142–53. 1 Cor. 10.21 states: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."

534. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 143-44. See Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 13.3–4.

535. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 144.

cult, a sacrifice" and any participation in the Roman *Parentalia* (the feasts of the dead in February) was complicity in practices of a "magical and superstitious nature" and therefore, forbidden to Christians.[536] According to the hermeneutics of suspicion, these ecclesiastical complaints became necessary because the banquets for the dead in fact persisted, and they did so for centuries.

Fourth, Christian memorials also included regular visits to the graves of departed family members and eventually the local martyr-saints. However, instead of taking food, drink, or domestic gifts to the cemeteries, Tertullian (third century) encouraged Christians to bring offerings (*oblationes*) to the church for a eucharistic celebration in the name of a deceased relative.[537] The offerings, bread and wine, were consecrated during the celebration and because the family was the donor, their departed relative benefited by being named in the eucharistic prayers.[538] In the fourth and fifth centuries debate arose concerning whether or not the names of the donors should also be made public; however, in Jerome's opinion "the naming of the donors was a sign of pride."[539] From that point, the record is not clear regarding whether prayers for the departed were made in general terms or listed individually but evidence from Christian communities in Egypt and Syria

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536. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 144–45.

537. In referring to the eucharistic offerings of bread and wine, Tertullian uses the terms, *oblations facere, oblations reddere*, and *offere* in each of his three treatises, *On the Crown* 3.3, *Exhortation to Chastity* 11, and *On Monogamy* 10. Part of the offering of bread and wine from the family was consecrated and the remainder was "distributed to the poor or eaten after the service." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead,* 153–55. As to whether the patron should be named in the eucharistic prayer at the Mass, an example occurred in the third century when Cyprian was asked to rule on the case where a bishop's will stipulated that the clergy should offer regular prayers on his behalf at the eucharist, that is, "for his repose … at the altar of God"; Cyprian ruled the practice should not be allowed as it distracted the bishops and presbyters celebrating the Mass. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead,* 154.

538. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 154–55.

539. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 155.

report a practice—possibly arriving from Jerusalem—of reciting aloud the names of the departed after the consecration of the eucharist.[540] However, it was not clear which names were mentioned—only the "holy" martyrs, deceased confessors, and priests? Or were the "ordinary departed" named too? And what about the donors and patrons? Indeed, in North Africa during Augustine's time, the eucharistic service allowed for a recitation of the names of the martyrs, saints, and bishops and only "a general commemoration of the departed [laity] without any recital of their names."[541]

Apparently, in the Christian communities of Antioch, Constantinople, and Alexandria of the fifth century, the churches had adopted the practice of commemorating solely the deceased clergy.[542] The custom was to keep an ongoing list of all members of the clergy and "to have their names read out of the list during the eucharist"; the names were recorded in the *diptychs* (two tablets attached in the centre fold with a hinge), which always lay on the altar.[543] Presumably the list contained names of both the living and dead clergy and by being read aloud, the names would solicit prayers from the people gathered in the church for worship.[544] The practice did not sit well with some of the laity but more about that situation in the next section.

Fifth, the desire to be remembered had always been important for Romans, even after converting to Christianity. As the fourth and fifth centuries saw the rise of the cult

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540. Srawley, *Early History*, 68–70, 94.

541. Srawley, *Early History*, 147.

542. This is a good example of the diverse 'regionalism' of Christian practices.

543. For further discussion of *diptychs* see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 158.

544. On the function of the *diptychs* (books of prayer), see Srawley, *Early History*, 90.

of the martyrs and Christian funerary banquets were extended to include the "extraordinary dead" on their special feast days, Christians used another way to ensure being remembered in perpetuity—patronage. Not only did Christians seek to acquire the relics of the saintly martyrs who had died for Christ but wealthy men and women sought the honor of establishing shrines to house the holy relics.[545] According to MacMullen, "those who provided this or that adornment of the building had their names immortalized in commemorative inscriptions" or "in the mosaics on the floor" of the *martyrium* or basilica; an example is found in the basilica of Pisidian Antioch (fourth century).[546] Furthermore, patrons of saints' relics earned the privilege of *ad sanctos*, having their own burials and those of their family placed near the grave of the holy saint/martyr, thereby sharing in the holiness and favors of that saint/martyr.[547] The basilicas built for the saints drew crowds of Christians who came to join in the cult, to pray, to bring offerings for the feasting, and others who came to be buried *ad sanctos*.[548] The anniversaries of the saints—as well as the anniversaries of deceased family members buried near the saints—were celebrated in the cemetery soon (by the fifth century) housed under the roof of a grand memorial basilica and where the saint's *mensa* (table formed by the lid of the

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545. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 33–36.

546. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 22. One example of the commemorative inscriptions in floor mosaics is the fourth century basilica in Pisidian Antioch, the town (not to be confused with John Chrysostom's large city of Antioch). *Second Church*, 16–17, 21–22.

547. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 44.

548. The Manastirine cemetery near Salona in Dalmatia off the Adriatic Sea is an example of a fourth to sixth century martyr-shrine which became a basilica housing many chapels, dining tables (*mensae*) and a jumble of graves over a three or four hectare site containing some 450 sarcophagi. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 40–45.

sarcophagus) served as the altar top.[549] Augustine and Aurelius (bishop of Carthage) both found the festivities in the basilicas, held for the martyrs, to be "noisy [and] self-indulging; people ate too much; they drank too much; and they had too good a time, stayed up late or, indeed, all night."[550] Consequently, the Council of Carthage (397) "condemned the gross expenditure on meals eaten in the martyrs' honor" and another council in 401 "condemned dancing in the streets and plazas" in connection with the worship in the basilicas.[551]

During the fourth century and after the Peace of Constantine, seven new basilicas were built in Rome.[552] All had close connections with martyrs; six were built over the catacombs in the city suburbs; none were ordinary 'churches' because they had no provision or furnishings (like a baptistery, altar, sacristy) for religious services.[553] These basilicas "rapidly filled up with burials until absolutely every square inch was accounted for," until they became basically "roofed-over cemeteries accommodating the usual funerary meals, *refrigeria*—in short, 'gigantic dining rooms'."[554] Evidence of feasting (jugs, bowls, broken pots) have been uncovered in the archaeological excavations of the basilicas built in the fourth and fifth centuries; moreover, the epitaphs of the dead have

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549. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 48.

550. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 60–61.

551. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 61.

552. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 82.

553. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 82–83.

554. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 82–83.

remained inscribed on the floor stones to mark the burials beneath and on the walls to mark the burials placed in the *loculi* stacked floor to ceiling.[555]

Finally, Roman-Christians continued to ensure their own memory as part of their growing family, the community of Christians both living and dead. The necropolis surrounding Rome and other cities in Italy attest to the need to erect epitaphs, grave markers, and inscribed monuments. Aside from the vast necropolis outside Rome, another site of Roman and Christian commemorative burials lies near the port city of Ostia at Isola Sacra. There tomb-houses line the roads; plaques above the doorways announce the family or *collegium* housed inside while outside each tomb are stone couches, *mensae*, and braziers needed for cooking the frequent funerary picnic meals celebrated by the family or *collegium*.[556] The necropolis of Isola Sacra in late antiquity consisted mainly of the "bourgeois dead … shopkeepers, merchants, surgeons, craftsmen, and so forth, persons of comfortable means and artistic taste, nearly all Latin-speaking and thoroughly Roman in background."[557] Based on the inscriptions at Isola Sacra and elsewhere throughout the empire, Roman-Christians still believed in the spirits of the dead (known as *Manes*) since epitaphs addressing the deceased as spirits, *D(is) M(anibus)*, can be seen "on hundreds of Christian tombstones" mixed in among the tombstones of Roman pagans, much to the chagrin of Ambrose and bishops like him.[558]

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555. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 84.

556. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 78-79. See also Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 75, 82–86.

557. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 87.

558. The mixing of Christian and pagan burials was of concern to Ambrose in Milan, Cyprian in Carthage, and bishops in Rome. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 76 and 166n24. The *DM* on Christian epitaphs refers to the Roman ancestral prayer, "To the gods and the favoring spirits." MacMullen, *Second Church*, 110.

Women and Commemoration of the Dead

Therefore, with regard to domestic purification rites following the burial, until perhaps the fourth century, as suggested above, women continued to supervise the washing and cleaning of the house as they had done as Romans; they would have cleaned any items used around the corpse (blankets, pillows, bowls and so forth), and undertaken the purification rites required for persons directly involved in the caretaking and handling of the deceased.[559] However, death-pollution, while symbolizing the boundary between the living and the dead in the Greco-Roman world, was soon breached by the rise of the cult of the Christian martyrs.[560] As far as women's roles in memorializing the Christian dead, there are a number of significant findings. This study already touched on the angst of church authorities—particularly from the fourth and fifth centuries forward—regarding the decorum of women in public demonstrations of domestic religiosity such as funeral processions, funerary banquets, and martyrs' festivals. However, despite the concerns, Roman-Christian women maintained a prominent position in practices related to remembering the dead. Just how these women managed to function as ritual specialists in matters of death in the family (a private function) while memorializing the expanding family of ancestors and saints (a decidedly public role) is noteworthy. Remarkably Christian women in the late Roman period accomplished both roles rather well. In fact, the task was done with such finesse that the legacy left by women's contributions to the Christian identity has been a matter neglected, even overlooked, in the scholarship.

559. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 93–95.

560. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 4.

First, because it pertained to domestic religiosity, Christian women persevered as custodians of the home and family. The private rituals of *suffitio* or purification were nuanced because of the rise of the martyr cults (fourth to sixth centuries) and priests were more often accepted by the laity in their funerary rituals; there is evidence that priests were invited into homes (perhaps by the mother of the household) at the time of a death to purify and bless the family (for spiritual and physical health and well-being).[561]

Second, women's participation in Christian banquets for the dead was initially praised: it is "a wise widow," commented Tertullian, "who performs her duties to her dead husband when she "prays for his soul," requests his "refreshment [*refrigerium*]," and makes offerings "on the anniversaries of his falling asleep."[562] Christian women's continued involvement in funerary banquets is confirmed in fourth century wall paintings in the catacombs. Wives, mothers, grandmother, sisters, and daughters were not only present at the actual meals at table, but also functioned as banquet hosts. For example, Janet Tulloch has observed in three of four *frescoes* of funerary banquets from the Marcellino and Pietro catacomb in Rome, a pair of figures (male and female) shown raising wine cups to signal they are co-hosting the banquet.[563] Using a visual-studies approach to interpret the *frescoes* Tulloch concludes that in each case the woman was the presiding figure (or hostess) for several reasons: 1) her right hand is raised in the gesture of speech; 2) her gaze is focused on the wine cup in her left hand (signaling its importance); 3) the Latin inscriptions above the heads of the male-female pair indicate

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561. "Caesarius of Arles made ritual anointing a means of restoring health and forgiving sins [purification]—a ritual alternative to pagan magical medicine." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 59.

562. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead," 120–22. Also see Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 10.4.

563. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 178–79, 183–186.

the words of a toast—the request and its response; 4) the woman's head is veiled, perhaps suggesting she holds some position of significance (as engaged in ritual), and 5) the male figure is placed at the centre of the *mensa*, making him (the deceased) the honored guest and the other co-host.[564] It can be assumed that the female host offered the toast at the outset of the banquet before the family began dining; moreover, the representation of a woman as co-host of the banquet suggests that " a new visual index of women's status and morality was developed for Christian female believers" by this time.[565] The *frescoes* can be read as the newly evolving "cultural perception of female respectability … indexed by the woman's role in relation to her household [rather than her legal relationship with the *paterfamilias*] as someone who has reared children and provided hospitality for family, close relatives, and friends."[566]

Another instance, in Constantinople beyond the catacombs of Rome, involved one 'pious' woman ensuring the celebration of regular funerary banquets for several martyrs. Sozomen tells of a lady named Eusebia who commissioned a *mensa* with a hole in it to be set up over a casket (also with a hole in it) that she had purchased and filled with the bones of martyrs "hoarded" from the Christian persecutions in the 320s.[567] For a long time Eusebia kept the relics for "her personal benefit" to "communicate" by sharing food and libation with the spirits of the martyrs at funerary celebrations held for them on

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564. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 183–91.

565. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 192.

566. Tulloch, "Family Funerary Banquets," 192.

567. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 46. The story is taken from Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History (Historia Ecclesiastica)*, 9.2.1597.

their anniversary dates.[568] Later when she died, Eusebia was buried in the same casket, hoping that other Christians would continue to commune with her spirit and those of her precious martyrs.[569]

Christian funerary meals, like their Roman equivalents, were planned and organized in the home where managing the efficient transfer of necessary provisions, implements, and so forth (everything required for the "picnic" some distance from home) began. The following scenario may help to clarify the roles of women in the funerary meal.

The functioning of the *domus* (household/domestic setting) was the responsibility of the *mater* (the wife or mother) either by herself or with the help of kinswomen (or perhaps slaves if her status/wealth allowed). The *familial* or *collegial* gravesite would retain some of the cooking and dining amenities (pots, bowls, a brazier, water, couches, lamps, the *mensa*) but the expendables such as bread, cheese, wine, "a covered casseroles of stew," oil, fruit, "kindling and charcoal," vegetables, perhaps musical instruments and "sacks filled with straw" for padding the stone couches, would all need to be packed for transport.[570] Perhaps a mule and cart led by the *paterfamilias* would carry the supplies. Once the family and kinsfolk arrived at the cemetery, there would be merriment, and music, the wine would be chilled in the spring water, the brazier lit, perhaps some meat cooked, and the rest of the food preparation would begin; again it would require the

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568. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 46.

569. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 46.

570. See the narrative portraying the trip of an imagined/'typical' family to the cemetery for a funerary picnic in MacMullen, *Second Church*, 79–80.

domestic skills of the women who were hosting the event.[571] As the meal was served, cups would be raised frequently to toast the departed while wine was poured onto the stone *mensa* to trickle down to the grave underneath. Likely the women preparing and serving the food from the *mensa* would make sure small portions washed down the opening on the tabletop "for the enjoyment of the beloved below, for as everyone knew, the dead needed food and drink."[572]

A third consideration is the question of who performed the practical job of scheduling the many anniversary meals at the cemetery. Undoubtedly, this was a domestic task left up to women. Conceivably, the *mater* would know which other families were celebrating in neighboring cemeteries and when so that social mingling among the families could occur. Once the funerary banquets moved indoors to the basilicas for martyr celebrations, socializing among Christians was facilitated even further, thus providing opportunity for developing and expanding the Christian communal identity.[573]

Fourth, in terms of tomb visitations on days not scheduled for funerary "picnics," the example of Monica, Augustine's mother is once again relevant. In *Confessions*, Augustine recounts that Monica would take bread and wine to the cemeteries (where the martyr-churches were located in her son's diocese in Hippo) for her own relatives and for martyrs interred there; but when she arrived in Milan with the same intentions, she was

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571. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 55.

572. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 44–45.

573. Yasin, "Funerary Monuments," 433.

corrected.[574] Her dear friend, the bishop Ambrose, had strictly forbidden Christians from taking food and drink into *martyria* or basilicas to eat and drink with the deceased.[575] The legislation was likely necessitated because women were sharing food and drink with the saints and ancestors far too frequently.

In fact, the 'food and drink' expanded to include the eucharist as *viaticum*, offered to the deceased either as part of the funerary meal or as a grave-gift, or perhaps both. In certain locales, the deceased were offered *viaticum* for spiritual protection and sustenance; we know this occurred from the frequent church councils that ruled repeatedly against the practice of giving *viaticum* to the dead.[576] This thesis has already speculated (using the hermeneutic of suspicion) that women were probably part of the reason for the conciliar decrees because late legislation at the Council of Rheims (627-30) named women in particular among those forbidden from taking "consecrated particles" to the dying (and dead).[577]

Fifth, in an attempt to redirect the *oblationes* (bread and wine) carried to the tombs, the bishops tried to encourage Christians to bring their offerings to the church. As discussed earlier, when *oblationes* were brought to be consecrated in the church, Christians expected the name of the deceased, as requested by the donor, would become part of the eucharistic prayer. In one case, as Gregory of Tours relates it, a certain widow

574. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 6.2.2, 134–36.

575. Augustine, The Confessions, 6.2.2, 134–36. On ancients taking food offerings to the dead, MacMullen states, "worshippers in a martyr church or chapel ate and drank as Christians had been doing at graves and shrines since the second century. Eating and drinking was worship." *Second Church*, 57–58.

576. On church restrictions regarding *viaticum* given to the dying and the dead as decreed by various church councils, see Rush, *Death and Burial*, 98–101.

577. On the Council of Rheims, see this chapter, 103n347 and 104n349.

brought daily offerings of wine to the church so that prayers would be made for the repose of her dear departed husband.[578] Conceivably, other women took regular offerings to the church so prayers were offered for deceased loved ones, too. However, we know that the names of the "ordinary dead" were not always recited during church services; instead, it was more common for the list of deceased clergy to be read aloud from the *diptychs*.[579] In addition, in the seventh century "confraternities of prayer' were contracted between religious institutions for prayer and votive masses for deceased clergy (bishops, abbots, monks, and priests) and these prayers preempted prayers for the "ordinary" deceased.[580] As one might expect, this approach to the implementation of the church's prayers for the dead was not well received by some of the Christian laity (and by some pious women). For instance, the nuns of a convent in Remiremont (Gaul) began to keep a book of "names of the people, both living and dead, for whom a special daily mass of

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578. Apparently by the eighth century, it was a practice of the church to include at the Mass in the eucharistic prayer, a prayer in general terms on behalf of all believers and all the departed with special attention to the bishops of the community. Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 156–57. See also Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Confessorum*, translated by Raymond Van Dam, vol. 5 of *Translated Texts for Historians* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988, repr. with corrections, 2004), 64.

579. On reading the names of clergy from the *diptychs*, see 149n543 and 149n544 in this chapter. For further discussion on the rationale for the limitations of the eucharistic prayer, see Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 174. The bishops insisted "the universal Church prays only for baptized Christians who did not die in a state of sin." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 174. The names read in the eucharistic prayer were not the same as the general intercession for the dead made after the consecration in the 'Prayer for the Dead'; the church therefore, left it up to individual families to pray for their deceased family members and offer good works on their behalf—that is, the dead must count on the help of their relatives; consequently, in the fifth century, "the church had left the responsibility for commemorating the dead to the family and friends of the departed." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 173–75. Augustine states that "one should not deny the utility of the prayer for the dead, but it benefits only those who were worthy during their lives." Augustine, *Enchiridion*, edited by Ernest Evans, CCSL 46 (Turnhout, Brepols, 1969), 29.110. English translation, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, translated by Louis A. Arand. ACW 3 (Westminster: Newman, 1955), 29.110. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on the Acts* 21.4) on the other hand reaffirms God's mercy since "the sinner can be aided by good deeds done in his name" or alms may be given to widows with a request to pray for the deceased and "in exchange for alms they receive," because, as Chrysostom states, "widows standing around and weeping know how to rescue, not indeed from the present death, but from that which is to come." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 173–74.

580. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 135–37.

commemoration [votive mass] was to be offered."[581] The memorial lists known as the *Liber Memorialis* were written and added to continuously for over four hundred years by more than fifty scribes (presumably the women of the convent).[582] The scribes signed themselves only by numbers whenever they "entered both lists of names and records of grants wherever they could, tucking them when necessary into any available blank space, between lines, in the margins, and over erasures."[583] As Paxton explains, those whose names appeared in the *Liber Memorialis* "enjoyed a special relationship with one another; they were joined, in life and death, in the common enterprise of supplication, which was the only means of ensuring their eventual incorporation into the blessed community of the saints."[584] It was one more example of how the formation of Christian collective identity was made possible through the initiative of women—in this case, the nuns.

Finally, commemoration of the dead was promoted through the patronage (*euergetism*) of wealthy Christian women. Female patronage became commonplace with the rise of the cult of the martyrs in the late Roman period (250–450 C.E.). Well-to-do Christian widows and *matronae* emerged as patrons of chapels, burial gardens, collegia,

581. The *Liber Memorialis* was instituted at the end of the eighth century. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 137.

582. Giles Constable, in speaking about the *Liber Memorialis,* maintains there were 160 scribes (Paxton claims "more than fifty", *Christianizing Death,* 137) who worked on the commemoration books containing not only the names of those who had died and who had requested commemorative masses/prayers, but also names of all living and deceased donors who had contributed alms or property to the nuns at the abbey and those who had paid rent for lands owned by the abbey. "The *Liber Memorialis* of Remiremont" *Speculum* 47.2 (Apr 1972): 262-64.

583. Constable, *Liber Memorialis*, 263.

584. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 137. Until the eighth century the special prayers and rituals for the dying and the dead were for clergy only; "there is no evidence from the eighth century that these rituals reached beyond the wall of cathedral or monastery and into the lives of the laity. But the goals of the Carolingian reform were always expressed in language that included not only clerics but all Christian men and women, and the ninth century would see a concerted effort to involve the laity in the new *artes moriendi*" (127).

martyria, churches, and monasteries. These women were combining their piety for the Christian martyrs with the commemoration of their *familia*. For example, near the city of Salona in the fourth century a rich woman named Asclepia built a chapel over the burial of Saint Anastasius in order that she and *her husband* might also be buried there.[585] Another case shows devoted patronage of a Christian daughter, Statulenia Iulia and her family for *their mother*. Below is the dedication discovered at Satafis (North Africa) in the third century:

> To the memory of Aelia Secundula:
> We all have already spent much, as is right, on the burial, but we have decided furthermore to put up a stone dining chamber where Mother Secundula rests, wherein we may recall the many wonderful things she did, the while the loaves, the cups, the cushions are set out, so as to assuage the sharp hurt that eats at our hearts. While the hour grows late, gladly will we revisit our tales about our virtuous mother, and our praises of her, while the old lady sleeps, she who nourished us and lies forever here in sober peace. She lived 72 years.
> – Dated by the province's year 260 [A.D. 299].
> Statulenia Iulia set up [the memorial].[586]

Another case is the widow Turtura, mentioned in an earlier section. Her grave rests in the catacomb of Commodilla and the inscription reveals that Turtura was responsible for the building of a small underground basilica for Saints Felix and Adauctus.[587] She also arranged for the burial of strangers and the poor in the catacomb *ad*

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585. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 47.

586. The dedication is found at Ain Kebira = Satifis, *CIL* 8.20277 = E. Diehl, *Insciiptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1925-31), 1.301 no. 1570. MacMullen, *Second Church,* 58. MacMullen explains that he prefers to translate the term "*mensa*" (found in the inscription) as its "older meaning of 'table'" instead of "stone dining chamber" (referring to the entire room) as used in the translation given. MacMullen, *Second Church*, 160n27.

587. Osiek, "Roman and Christian," 268.

sanctos (near) the two holy martyrs.[588] Similarly, Faltonia Hilaritas, used her personal wealth to build a cemetery at Velletri in Latium; she was undoubtedly the private patron of this burial complex, likely for her own family, but she bequeathed it to the church for the burial of the poor, widows, and strangers upon her own death.[589] Further, an inscribed plaque *in situ* commemorates the Christian charity of Faltonia Hilaritas.

Carolyn Osiek summarizes the implication of women patrons like Asclepia, Statulenia Iulia, and Turtura to late-antique Christianity as follows:

> The prominence of Christian women in this particular exercise of patronage is indicative of the significant numbers of women who owned land and were in the position of head of household with responsibility to provide burials for the *familia*, which then extended to others, especially the needy members of the church.[590]

In summary, Christian women in late antiquity played a number of roles in terms of dying, death, and commemoration of the dead. Certainly women were patrons of the martyr cult, arguably a more ‘public’ role. But within the private/domestic realm of the Christian family, women functioned as caregivers, teachers, facilitators, managers, organizers, guardians of tradition, and bearers of memories—roles derived from their position as ritual specialists.

Conclusion: Christian Women and Funerary Rituals

Previous studies that have examined early Christian women in terms of funeral rituals have noted women’s involvement in the martyr cult, the prominence of the female

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588. Osiek, “Roman and Christian,” 268.

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orans figures, the church's condemnation of hysterical lamenting women, and the presence of women in *frescoes* depicting funeral meals. However, these studies have tended to examine this evidence as separate phenomena. This thesis indicates that all these observations (women + martyr cult; women + *orans*; women + hysterical lamentation; women + funeral meals), along with the references to female practices associated with death, are all part of the continuation of the *sacra privata* connected with funerals. The point my thesis makes is that what previous scholars have examined in isolation is actually part of a cluster of activities performed by women as part of the *sacra privata*. Women were simply doing what was expected of them within their culture and within the realm for which they were responsible: domestic religiosity. In showing this, my thesis demonstrates the continuation of Roman practices by Christian laity and the contribution made by late-antique women within the ritual sphere defined by *sacra privata*. As well, this thesis illustrates women's continuation in the formation of Christian identity and implies, or at least hints at how women had potential roles in mediating the process of resistance, assimilation, and adaptation that would later produce the formal sacrament of *Extreme Unction*. Further, this study illustrates that the division *sacra publica* and *sacra privata* itself was assumed by Christianity and then later adapted. In the process, a specific creative tension was produced. This creative tension involved the function of women as ritual specialists within *sacra privata* and potentially contributed to women's prominence in specific areas such as the martyr cults. Finally, proving the continuation of the *sacra privata* in terms of funerary rituals highlights previously neglected practices such as lamentation and the development of Christian music as a counter or adaptation of Roman domestic religiosity.

Chapter Five

Implications and Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the convergence of women, funerary rites, and Christianity in late antiquity. It sought first, to demonstrate that Christian women on behalf of the family functioned as ritual specialists in matters of death for roughly seven hundred years; second, to establish that, as funerary ritualists, women contributed to an emerging Christian identity, and third, to suggest that women's specialization as funerary ritualists affirmed their unique status and essential role in western Christianity 200–800 C.E. The project required engagement with scholarly discourse on women's history and feminism (both political and theological feminism). It also adopted current practices within socio-historical reconstruction assuming that Christianity was part of a complex religious transformation of late-antique society and not a unique, triumphant *sui generis* that vanquished the pagan world. Finally, in implementing the aforementioned paradigm shift, this study addressed the anthropology of domestic religiosity "in dynamic relationship" with an emergent Christianity[591] and in so doing, exposed the importance of women in the self-definition of family, community, and church.

In order for the thesis to achieve its goals it followed a particular methodological framework. It adhered to a strict women's history approach. Its defined objectives, parameters, and heuristic categories were free of political feminism, feminist Christian theology, and gender history. It incorporated essential hermeneutical tools for the reading of androcentric texts and attempted to reconstruct the lives of Roman-Christian women in late antiquity as accurately as possible. So, how well did the project do? What

591. Frankfurter, *Roman Egypt,* 7.

contributions to existing knowledge in Religious Studies, early Christianity, and women's history were made? How does this project articulate with current scholarly discourse on the topic? Finally, what questions might lead to future research? The analysis follows.

Interpreting the Findings

This project suggested that throughout the western empire Christian women, on behalf of the *familia*, functioned as ritual specialists in matters of death until about the eighth century. The preceding chapters demonstrated that during late antiquity Christian women were responsible for the family's religious response to dying and death. As was the case throughout the Mediterranean of this time, women were the main caregivers in the family; their role was to ensure the proper handling of important life-passages, like death, on behalf of the family, and these duties occurred in the domestic space. The early church left the family in charge of death and burial and was neither interested nor involved with funerary matters until the fourth and fifth centuries when the bishops began to speak out about certain funeral practices and to suggest that the people incorporate the church more often in their mortuary practices. This was the beginning of a tension that became increasingly agonistic between the clergy and the laity. By ca.750 a formal liturgical sacramentary—The Vatican Gelasian—emerged in the Frankish kingdoms; it was the first of several ecclesiastical responses to the death of a Christian. By the tenth century (now beyond my study), *extrema unctio* was adopted as the Christian burial service in some regions of the West, but was not named a sacrament of the church until the Council of Trent ca.1545. These appear to be the historical facts as best they can be discerned using the literary and non-literary texts and material culture available.

Implications About Women as Funerary Ritualists

This study determined that for almost seven centuries women, in the context of domestic religiosity, orchestrated various ritual practices surrounding Christian death. However, that is not to say that the men of the family had no function in late-antique funerals. The evidence reveals that all family members participated in domestic funerary rituals and males in the family grieved, carried the deceased to the grave, performed the public eulogy, provided the physical work of the actual burial, purchased family sarcophagi and funerary monuments, and more. However, because funerary rituals were initiated as part of the *sacra privata* involving the domestic sphere, women were the ritual specialists within this area.

As discussed in this study, funerary rituals were initially Roman, typically formulated by women of the household and passed down, revised, and reinterpreted through the generations. However, their dynamic nature also made these domestic rituals open to influence, adaptation, and ‘christianization.’ Church authorities (the bishops) realized the importance of incorporating common practices that the people were accustomed to and recreating them in Christian terms so the Christian laity could assimilate them. This assimilation becomes apparent, for example, with the inclusion of *viaticum*, ritual anointing, and banquet festivities at the cemetery basilicas. Notably, it was not until the rise of the cult of the martyrs in the third and fourth centuries that church authorities began to see any need for control of funerary rituals; the bishops realized they would have to appropriate the martyrs (bones, relics, and authority for *memoria*) from the control of the laity and procure the spiritual and corporeal (economic

and political) capital of the martyred saints for the entire church community.[592] Wresting control of mortuary rites from the people was no small feat, as the evidence has indicated. The bishops were forced to address the 'nerve centre' of the family cult of the dead—the women who performed the caretaking and nurture of the deceased (for example, preparation of the body for death and burial, provision of sustenance beyond death, hosting the banquets, performing the lamentation). Kinswomen held sway over the part desired by the bishops—the ritual care and sustenance of the dead. This suggests why the behaviors of women (for instance, their emotive public performances of lamentation, their feeding the dying and dead with the eucharistic *viaticum*) and the traditional forms of Greco-Roman worship (singing, dance, feasting and merry-making) became the targets of ecclesiastical ire and censure (for example, from Basil, John Chrysostom, the Gregory's, Augustine, and others).[593]

Another piece of this fascinating puzzle are hints of connections between funerary liturgy produced by ecclesiastically controlled monasteries, the role of monasteries in caring for the sick and dying, and the ability of abbeys and convents to record, formalize, and harmonize the practice of rituals often under the direction of the bishop. As indicated, the laity was not entirely forthcoming in simply handing-over their funerary rituals to the church. However, by the sixth century in southeastern Gaul, Caesarius the bishop of Arles, working upon the request of his sister, a nun of the abbey at Chelles, established "a short prayer service said over a dead body and at burial" for the nuns who died in his

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592. The control of the cult of the saints meant power and prestige, especially the "supernatural extension" of power and prestige. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* 86-96;

593. MacMullen, *The Second Church,* 106-108.

sister's monastic community.[594] Shortly afterward, Caesarius inaugurated a formalized response to sickness and dying with three conditions: 1) ritual anointing; 2) the reception of the eucharist together with penance (*viaticum* now included both communion and penance), and 3) the requirement that the three rituals (anointing + eucharist + penance) be held in the church.[595] In the seventh and eighth centuries in Gaul, Spain, and Ireland a component for death and burial similar to Caesarius' ritual for nuns became common in the development of funerary liturgies in those regions.[596] The eighth century produced Frankish-Gelasian ritual books (or *sacramentaries*) written and enacted in "clerical and monastic communities" and reflective of the councils called by Pippin I and later by Charlemagne.[597] In ca. 750 the abbey at Chelles, which held close ties with the royal court around the time of Pippin I, became the site of the writing of the Vatican Gelasian. The rituals were compiled, altered, and/or copied "from an exemplar" by the nuns; the *sacramentary* continued the elements of the Roman rites mixed with non-Roman funerary materials.[598] The point is, the rites were influenced by Roman domestic practices and were collated by women. One scholar has speculated that the new church rituals were

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594. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 48-55. These prayers become "basic to all later Gallican and Frankish burial services, which developed within and around its basic structural elements." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 52.

595. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 50-52.

596. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 55-83.

597. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 96-97. The Gelasian *sacramentaries* contained "miscellaneous prayers, masses, blessings, and rituals, including those for the sick, dying, and dead." Notably, the masses described are commemorative and votive masses for the dead. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 98-99. Paxton states, "Within the monasteries and cathedral churches of the later eighth century numerous men and women worked at the composition, copying, and transmission of ritual books for everyday use." Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 102. Again, women are involved in the transmission of Christian identity.

598. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 102.

for clerical use only and never "reached beyond the walls of cathedral or monastery and into the lives of the laity" at least until much later.[599] However, from the eighth century forward the bishops replaced laywomen as funerary ritualists for bereavement in Christian families.

Conclusions About Women and Christian Identity

This study showed that women contributed in several significant ways to the formation of Christian identity. The identity-formation process was a lengthy exercise in negotiation, assimilation, and adaptation on many fronts including ritual practices for sickness, death, burial, and commemoration of the dead in which women functioned prominently (for example, regarding the 'holy dead'). Essential to one's 'being Christian' in late antiquity was the provision of funerary rituals not only for Christians, but also for strangers, plague victims, and the poor.[600] The rituals for death and burial were initially managed by women and were eventually appropriated by the bishops of the church. Rather significantly, the rituals began in the home and at the family tomb, and within seven hundred years had moved into churches and basilicas. The notion of 'Christian' funerary rites therefore, grew out of what women had nurtured and guided for

599. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 127.

600. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 2. Harland follows the work of Fredrik Barth regarding "ethnic identity" referring "to a particular group's shared sense of belonging together because of certain experiences and notions of connection deriving from group-members' *perceptions* of common cultural heritage and common … ancestral origins …the imagined connections and the categories used by participants to classify themselves or others in [group] … terms may, and often do, change over time … nonetheless, if a given … group is to continue, what is maintained is the 'continued interest on the part of its members in maintaining the boundaries, which are considered to separate members of the … group ('us') from others ('them')." Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 6. Notably, Harland points out, the "collective concept of identity is particularly fitting in studying the world of the early Christians." Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 7. In addition, on the matter of constructing the Christian identity, Rebillard states, "Duty to remember the martyrs or duty to support the destitute, the duty to bury the dead played a significant role in the construction of a Christian identity throughout the third century and at the beginning of the fourth." Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*, 100.

generations.[601] As women and their families converted to Christianity women simply transferred their roles as ritualists in matters of death to the new tradition. From within their domestic roles as wives, mothers, and widows, women continued as caretakers of the dying and the dead, as ritual anointers, as mourners and performers of lament (poets, singers, musicians, and dancers), and as faithful guardians and sustainers of the cult of the ancestors—which after the fourth century included the cult of the martyrs and saints. In short, Christian women maintained for Christianity the pious functions already performed in the key social unit of Roman identity, the *familia*. Women remained managers of funerary ritual and guardians of the cultural, social, and religious life of domestic Christianity; over a span of seven centuries women were gradually removed from their role in the home and replaced by bishops performing the same role but now in the churches. ‘Christian’ funerary ritual therefore, evolved from the hybridization of multiple interactions, assimilations, and adaptations negotiated in large part by women on behalf of Christian families (the laity).

Furthermore, the tradition of recording family relationships in epigraphy, iconography, and architecture fostered “collective identity” and “memory-building” first, within the Roman community, and then for Christianity’s own construction of group identity. Notably, the corpus of visual evidence shows that in dealing with death, the

601. Identity for the Roman-Christian family was solidified through the use of familial language making it possible to reach across the boundary between the living and the dead; ancestors continued forever as *familia*. As early as the first century Christian house churches had adopted “fictive family language,” (brothers, sisters, brethren) which reinforced for members the sense of community belonging, Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 63–65. By the fourth century, Christianity was institutionalizing, hierarchy had appeared, doctrine was debated and established, and the church was beginning to view itself as quite distinct from the Christian lay family; as the Christian ecclesiastical family (using language such as “sons and daughters of God” and “brothers and sisters in Christ”) interacted and negotiated with the lay family, the result was necessarily assimilations, or “cultural interchanges and processes of boundary negotiation associated with [their] encounters.” Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*, 102.

tendency was towards a slow and gradual syncretization of ideas rather than any 'instantaneous' shift to Christian theology. Just as Roman funerary culture established and reinforced collective memory for the Roman family and the state, so too did Christian culture (initiated by women and created in remembrance of Christian martyrs and saints) solidify Christianity's collective identity. Christian women, again on behalf of the family, continued to function as patrons, maintainers, and promoters of funerary art, architecture, and artifacts. They preserved their roles as guardians, teachers, and promoters of Roman domestic virtues—duty to one's *familia* (*pietas*), family solidarity (*communitas*), and family harmony and cooperation (*concordia*)—through regular visitations, grave offerings, and the upkeep of Christian material culture. The "objects of memory" preserved the past—the 'ordinary dead,' and the holy dead'—for the living and allowed for imaginative reconstruction of a Christian community for both participants and observers. Consequently, material culture effectively bound together a sense of religiosity and identity. Undoubtedly, women, funerary ritual, and the associated materiality were critical to the formation of Christian identity.

Conclusions About Women's Status as Funerary Ritualists

Did specialization as funerary ritualists provide a specific status and role for Christian women in late antiquity? Before answering, an observation can be made about the status attributed to Greco-Roman women in their positions as domestic funerary ritualists. The research conducted by this study on women and funerary rituals prior to Christianity, and based on a wide representation of previous scholarship, confirmed that Roman women were awarded special status in Roman society because of their essential

role in caring for the dead. Their status was acknowledged in Greco-Roman literature, in funerary art, and in Roman epigraphy.

What about Christian women, did the church provide them status comparable to that of the Greco-Roman women, given they performed virtually the same function? This study revealed that in some respects Christian women were acknowledged for their role in caring for the dead. For instance, in the area of female patronage during this period, several catacombs and basilicas were named after female (patron) saints and martyrs on whose behalf the structures were built.[602] Sometimes a female Christian patron was acknowledged as benefactor of a *collegium* (for example, Turtura). On the other hand, the affirmation of the role women played in Christian funerary ritual is mostly absent from androcentric textual sources; in fact, ecclesiastical documents tend to be highly critical and negative regarding women's participation in funerary practice—for instance, in terms of lament and public care of the dead (tomb visitations, handling of the eucharist/*viaticum* for the dead). As far as inscriptions naming women as patrons/benefactors of tombs for family or *collegia*, the work of Osiek, Eisen, and others has been most useful but more investigation remains.[603] Eisen acknowledges there are more than fifty thousand Greek and Latin Christian inscriptions found on tombs throughout the Roman Empire; to my knowledge, there is no analysis of epitaphs (or documentary papyri for that matter) that

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602. See the map on the frontispiece of Nicola Denzey's book showing the location of forty some catacombs discovered in the vicinity of Rome; according to the legend on the map, of the forty catacombs indicated, about fifteen are named after women. Names such as, Bassilla, Commodilla, Domitilla, Priscilla, and Thecla are included. Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), frontispiece.

603. Ute Eisen presents insight into the vast amount of work left to do in the analysis of late-antique inscriptions, documentary papyri, and graffiti. Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 1-21 The focus in scholarship has begun to shift in that direction; for example, see Osiek, "Roman and Christian," 257n22, listing some more recent work analyzing inscriptions searching for clues about the practice of patronage.

locates and records women in funerary roles—specific ritual roles within the *familia* or as *praeficae* or undertakers (for example, specializing as *pollinctores*) and what those roles entailed.[604]

Contributions of This Study

This thesis has contributed to women's history by virtue of its focus on late-antique Roman-Christian women. The research methods incorporated avoided the past entanglement of political feminism, feminist theology, and historiography pertaining to issues of gender, women's authority, and women's status in terms of church leadership. On the other hand, the study confirmed that early Christian women performed their duties on behalf of the *familia* by incorporating the piety of domestic religiosity embracing rituals for death, burial, and remembrance of the dead. This important function—equal parts *duty, concordia,* and *compassion*—earned women a certain status and authority as ritual specialists, certainly within the family. Further, women were vital contributors to the development of Christian identity as demonstrated by their role in the cult of the martyrs; that contribution paved the way for the expansion of the Christian family to include the saints, and for the church to adopt the family model in its beliefs (which eventually became the doctrine of *the communion of saints*). As far as whether this study concluded definitively that church authorities recognized women for their contributions in terms of identity and liturgy, the evidence is inconclusive. It appears that women's domestic religiosity took on different dimensions by the end of late antiquity; however, any assessment must be left for another thesis.

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604. Eisen, "Women Officeholders," 18-21.

So, considering the results of the present study, are the findings significant, and if so, for whom? First, the findings of this study provide groundwork for the investigation of a myriad of sub-topics. Numerous 'windows' have opened such as:

1) The role of the monasteries and nuns in matters of death in late antiquity;
2) Charlemagne and Pippin's involvement in the formalizing of death and burial liturgies for the Latin church;
3) The role of women in late-antique hospices/hospitals (the care of the sick);
4) Women, the family, and the use of *viaticum* as 'medicine' in late antiquity;
5) Women and funerary lamentation in late antiquity;
6) The place of music and singing in funerary practices in late antiquity;
7) Women and ritual anointing in late antiquity;
8) Women and funerary banquets in basilicas in Rome after 400 C.E.;
9) Women and grave offerings during Christian late antiquity;
10) The relationship between the clergy and the laity's domestic religiosity regarding death and burial in late antiquity;
11) Women's patronage of cemeteries and tombs in Christian late antiquity;
12) The role of the church councils in matters of death and burial in the Latin west;
13) Women and the development of church liturgies for funerals in Spain and Gaul;
14) Women and development of church liturgies for funerals in Ireland and Britain;
15) Women's domestic religiosity and marriage rituals in late antiquity;
16) Women's domestic religiosity and rites for childbirth in late antiquity;
17) Women's involvement in funerary jobs such as *praeficae* or *pollinctores* as determined from epigraphy and papyri;

18) The role of women in the memory and memorial of the ancestors (and later the martyr saints) as it pertains to the development of Christian identity.

A second consideration is who may be interested in the findings of this research or who may find the results valuable? Those tracking the activities of women in early Christianity or those looking at domestic religiosity (at least in terms of death) in late antiquity may find this research of interest. It may confirm for them what practices were included in “church tradition” in the early centuries or may provide credence for the idea that women were substantively responsible for the formation of church liturgy. It may be that feminists will view the information as significant from their perspective—yet the findings were gleaned entirely without the use of political or theological feminism. In general, scholars of early Christianity, and those studying the church in late antiquity or in the early medieval period—especially in terms of rituals, liturgy, the role of women in death, and the part played by domestic religiosity in the development of Christian funerals—will likely celebrate that the many ‘crumbs’ (clues and bits of evidence) have been gathered together in one treatise. Finally, in the context of women’s history, this thesis has furthered a scholarly methodological approach to the study of early Christian women for several reasons: 1) it applied several hermeneutical tools for the reading of androcentric texts; 2) it placed late Roman women in their historical context; 3) it incorporated current social science theories and practices; 4) it did not view Christianity as unique and untouched by the rest of the late Roman period; it assumed instead that Christianity was a process, an evolution, and therefore not to be separated from its historical, social, political, economic context; 5) it made use of relevant historically-appropriate heuristic categories for understanding the functions of women; 6) it

acknowledged the importance of *sacra privata* in the lives of late Roman-Christian families; 7) it embedded Roman-Christian women into the economic, political, religious, and social realities of their lives, and 8) it avoided modern expectations for the roles of late-ancient Christian women. The consequences? Significantly, this thesis was able to contribute to women's history by strict adherence to the best practices currently available to scholarship in that field.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further to the topics suggested above for further study, this thesis showed the need for additional investigation of primary sources. Translation and cataloging of papyrus documentation (private letters, business contracts, legal and other official documents, sales records, inventories) are woefully scarce and still in the early stages of processing and publication. Similarly, sources for graffiti and votive texts are lacking in the topic of women and funerary ritual. Access to more of this type of data may reveal useful items for enhanced study; items of interest would include: announcements of funerals; death records; personal letters about death in the family; records of the sale of tombs, cemeteries, and sarcophagi; documents regarding the funerals and burials for *collegia*. Consequently, in projecting future research at the doctoral level, catalogues in languages other than English—not only for papyri, but also for graffiti, votive texts, and epigraphy—will be recovered and analyzed for relevant source material.

Second, investigations might examine funerary rites in late antiquity through the lens of ritual studies to determine how the development of a Christian liturgy was influenced by familial and social stability, or by the transformation of relationships

between the living and the dead. In addition, further research could explore why certain funerary rituals were more 'transferable' than others in terms of Christianity.

Third, just as there was a paucity of study on women and rituals for death in early Christianity, there is also a need for exploration pertaining to women and other rites of passage including birth, puberty, and marriage. Topics were specified in the list above.

Finally, this study validated the 'usefulness' of *sacra privata* as a heuristic category[605] that 1) better represents the historical complexity of late antiquity in terms of the gender separation formally understood under the rubrics of private and public; 2) assists in comprehending the evolution of Christian ritual, especially the liturgies for dying, death, and commemoration; 3) provides a broader understanding of the complex development of the Christian identity, the result of assimilation and resistance, boundary negotiations and modifications, and incorporation of the family model surrounding religious piety, and 4) provides a greater appreciation for the role that women played as mediators of ritual for dying, death, and commemoration in late-antique Christianity.

605. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Lisa A. Hughes for her suggestion to investigate the Roman *sacra* and its division into *privata* and *publica*. Her 'lead' proved most fruitful in the context of this thesis.

Appendix A: Images of Funerary Art

Figure 1: Deathbed Scene on Sarcophagus, located in Musée de Cluny in Paris. Source: Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 30, plate 10.

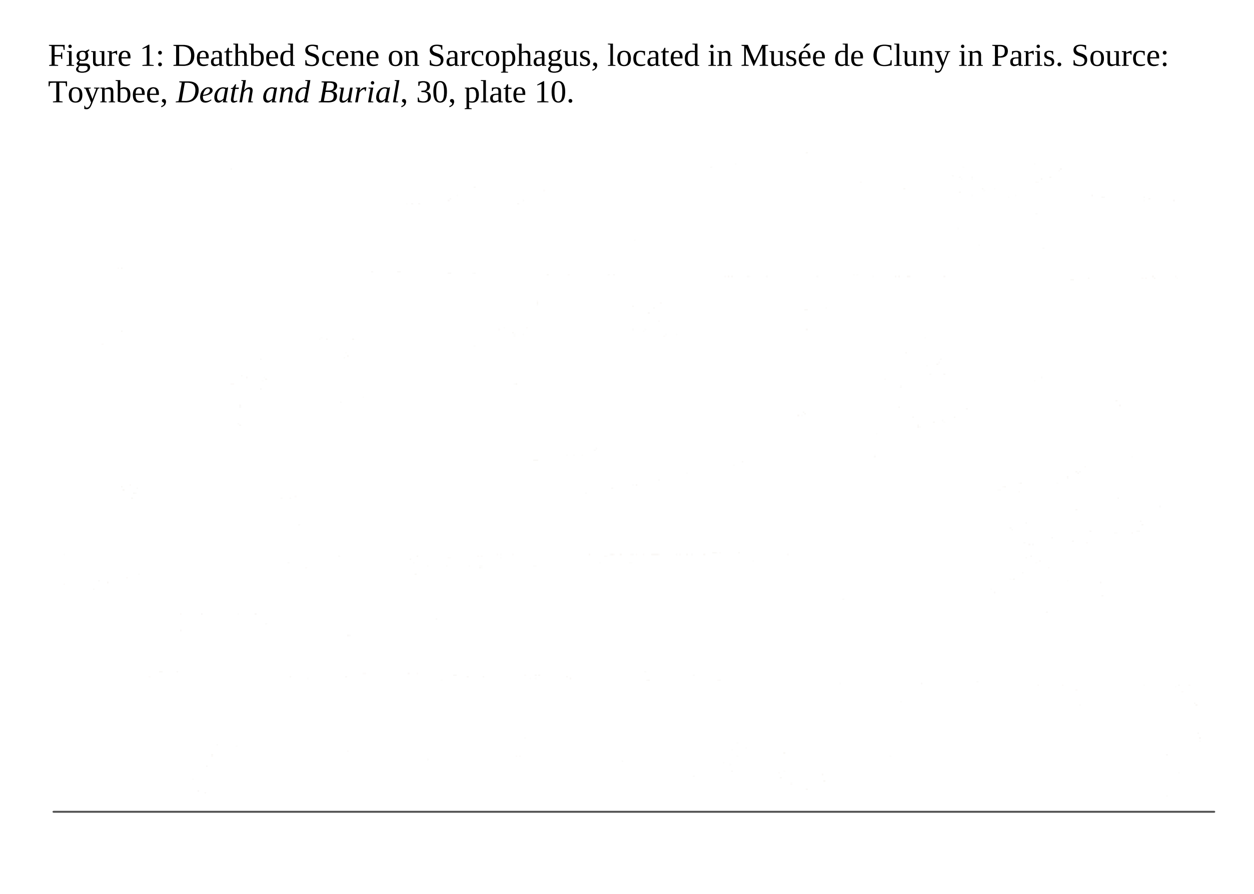


Figure 1a. Similar Death-bed Scene on Sarcophagus ca. second century C.E. British Museum, London. From: *Index of Images, Part XII*. Rights for non-commercial use with attribution to www. vroma.org. Photo: Barbara McManus. http://www.vroma.org/ images/mcmanus_images/sarco_girl_lectus.jpg (accessed July 6, 2011.

Figure 2: Funerary Plaque Illustrating the *Próthesis* and the behavior of the “chief mourner.” Terra cotta. 520–510 B.C.E. Archaic black figure, Greek. *Metropolitan Museum of Art*. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ works-of-art/54.11.5 (accessed July 6, 2011).

Figure 3: The Tomb of the Haterii Family. Illustrating the Wake. Relief on panel of sarcophagus in the Lateran collection, Vatican. From *Index of Images, Part XI: Barbara F. McManus*. Rights for non-commercial use with attribution to www. vroma.org. Photo: Barbara McManus. http://www.vroma.org/images/ mcmanus_images/haterius_funeral.jpg (accessed July 6, 2011).



Figure 4: Funerary Procession from Amiternum, Italy, marble relief, ca. first century B.C.E. Housed in Museo dell'Aquila. Source: Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 30, plate 11.

Figure 5 (above): “Mistress and Maid.’
Preparing gifts for grave visit.
White-ground *lékythos*. Athens NM 1929.
Source: Shapiro, “Iconography of
Mourning,” 652, fig. 24.

Figure 5a (above): “Visit to the Tomb.”
Woman presenting gift to the deceased.
White-ground *lékythos.* Athens.
Vlasto Collection. Source: Shapiro,
“Iconography of Mourning,” 650, fig. 22.

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